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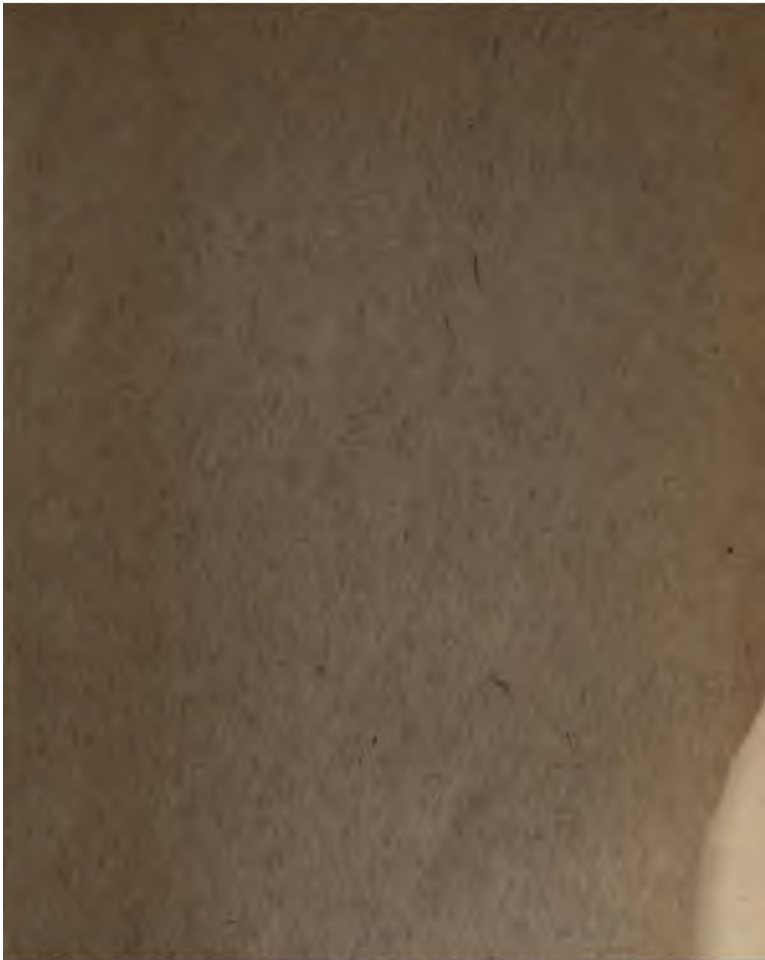
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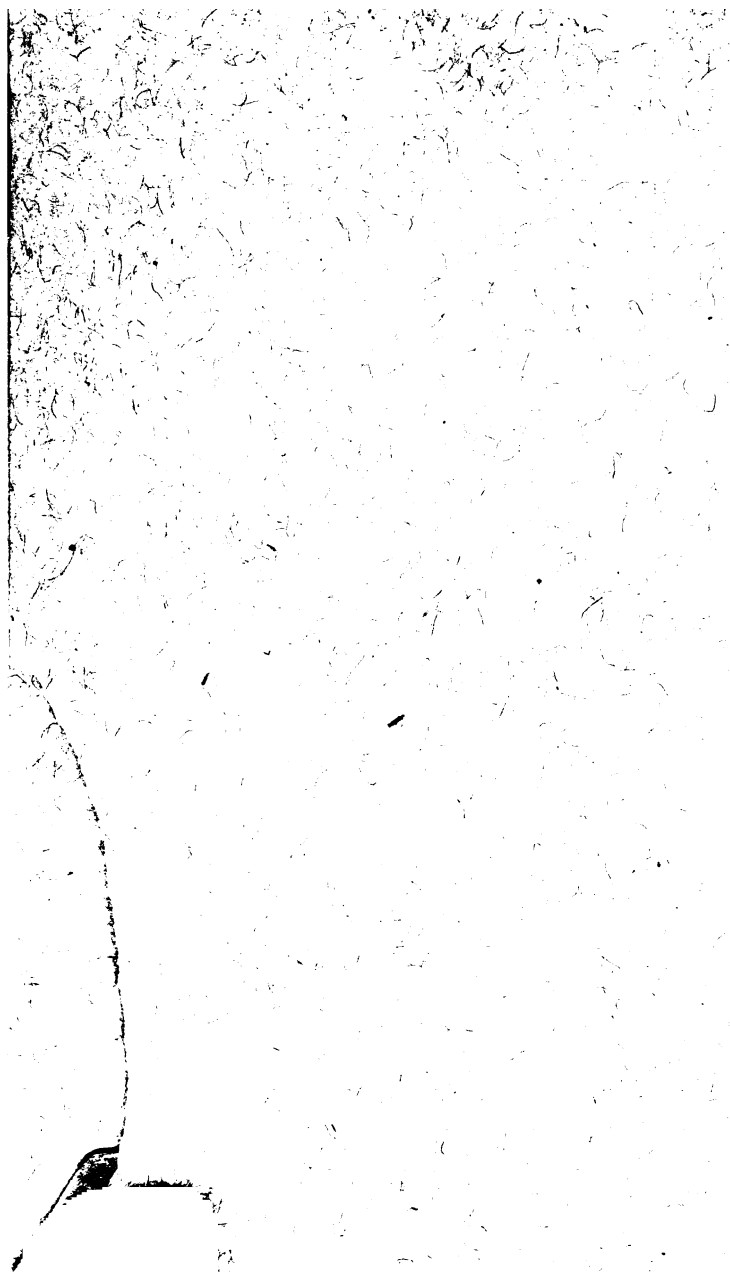
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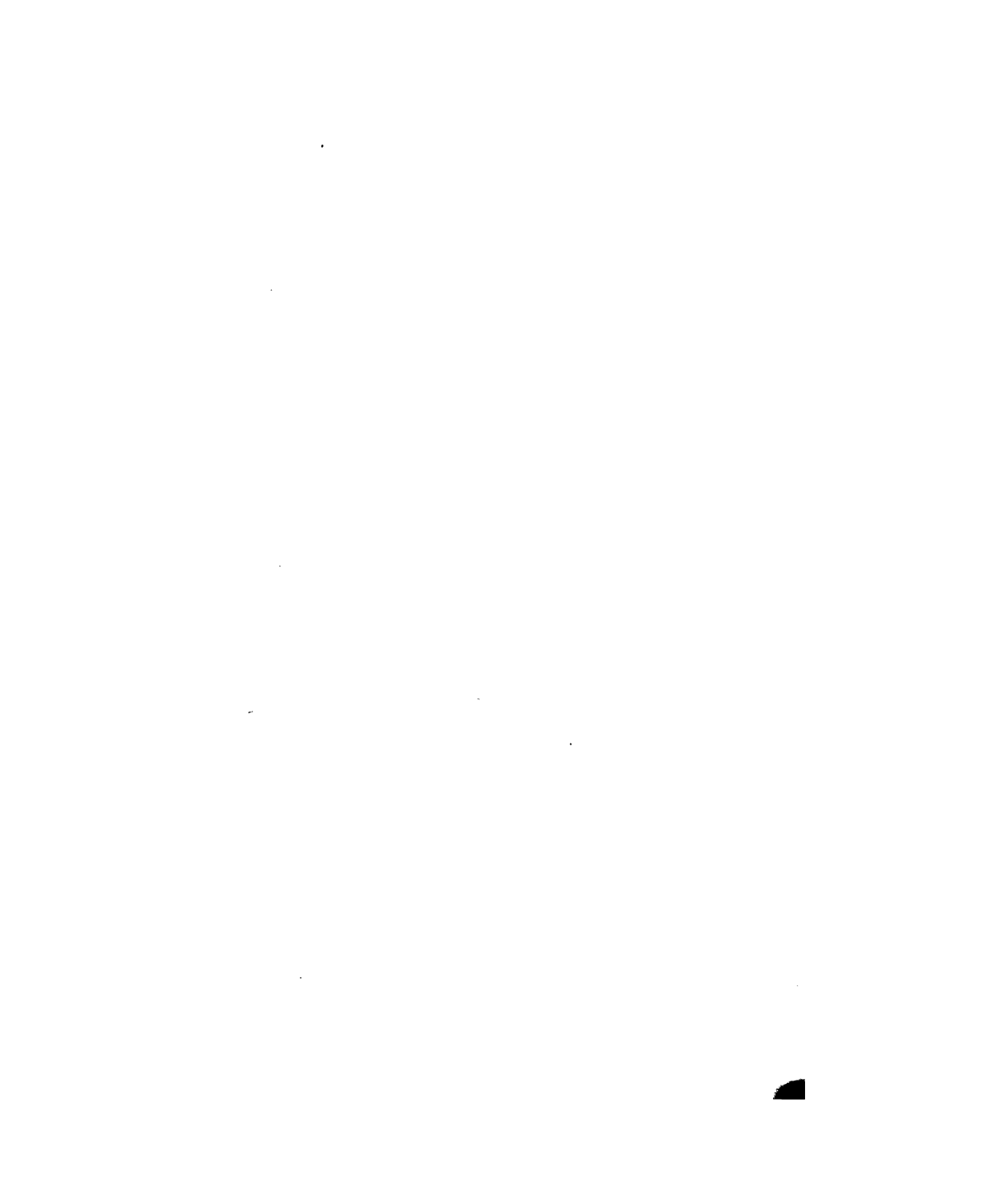


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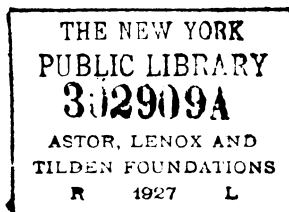
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THE HORNED CAT.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH I INTRODUCE MYSELF.

My father, James Halliday, will be remembered as a literary person of some estimation and influence. When he had crossed the indistinguishable line that separates middle from old age he discovered, to his surprise and grief, that he could neither sit so late as he had sat in his prime, nor write with so much clearness and vigor as had been wont to mark the productions of his pen. This latter discovery he might never have made but for the “d——d good-natured” criticism of friends and the suggestion of certain of his editors that he should seek change of work and change of scene. His health was breaking, and his outlook was gloomy—he had a wife and family to support (of whom I, Archibald, was the eldest)—when

some political friends (whose party was in power) got for him the English Consulate at Valencia. He had been there scarcely a year, when I—who alone of the family had been left in England to pursue my studies at Cambridge—received a telegram from my mother informing me that my father was dying, and bidding me go to her side at once. I set out with the permission and condolence of my college authorities, but in spite of my utmost speed, I arrived too late to see my father. When I reached Valencia by steamer from Marseilles, he was dead and buried. I had, therefore, to take charge of the family and the family affairs, the latter of which, I soon found, were in the extremest confusion. My father appeared to have kept neither accounts nor receipts, and his balance at his banker's was of the smallest. To make an end of a tedious matter, it was only after some time that I could form any idea how we stood, and whether we should have enough money to take us back to England. It was an anxious and sobering position for a young man of two-and-twenty, who had hitherto not been harassed by pecuniary cares, though not lavishly provided. I was now the head of the family, and had to consider how I was to “fend” (as northern folk say) for my mother, two ungrown sisters, and

a younger brother. It was clear I could not return to Cambridge, and I was boy enough to be sincerely glad thereof.

The assistant-consul played the part of adviser and friend, and while my father's affairs still hung in the balance—the scales inclining to the debit side—he one day came to me with *The Times* in his hand.

“Here is something,” said he, “that should just suit you. The advertisement is so very singular that I think few can have answered it; so you may have a chance, though the paper is a week old.”

The singular advertisement was as follows: “Wanted, a young gentleman from either university who has not bothered his head about college curriculum, nor the fiddle-faddles of tutors and professors; who is tolerably ignorant, that is to say, of the classics and mathematics, but has occupied himself with things of more immediate interest, such as the men and women around him, and the moths and butterflies above him. In short, I want a young man who is not a fool, and who is something of an entomologist. In order to be of sufficient use he must be able to speak and write Dutch or Spanish, or both; and in order to be company for an old man who has seen the world he must have trav-

elled. If he has travelled he will be prepared to appreciate the liberty of this house, and to cook (grill, not fry) a chop for himself and draw unlimited ale from the cellar. Salary will be liberal to a suitable person. Address Sir Ralph Grimston, the Wyitches, Ashdown, Blankshire."

The oddity of the thing took hold of me, and I sat down at once to offer my services ; for, of course, I considered myself a suitable person ; I was tolerably ignorant of what should have been my proper studies at Cambridge, I was deeply interested in natural history and had collected butterflies and moths since I was a boy in knickerbockers. I flattered myself that I knew something of men and women. I could read and write Spanish tolerably, and I had certainly travelled, for there I was writing from Valencia in Spain. I set forth my qualifications as modestly as I could, and asked for the small stipend of £200 a year "to begin with." I posted the letter as soon as it was written and approved, and then waited about on one leg, so to say, counting the days till an answer came, for I never doubted but that an answer would come.

And in due time an answer did come. It was couched in these terms : "I have had applications from all manner of idiots and pedants, so I was

glad to get your letter. I will try you till Christmas, that is, for fourteen weeks from now, and you shall have the salary you ask for with board and lodging. Come at once—by train from Marseilles. I will bear the expense.—RALPH GRIMSTON. P. S. I am said to be eccentric. I may sometimes do and say things that will excite your curiosity; but good manners will keep you from being inquisitive, from prying and questioning."

My friend and adviser thought with me that that, though a singular, was, on the whole, a promising letter. He counselled me, however, not to take all the family with me to England as I had intended, but to set out immediately alone. There were two or three reasons to recommend that advice: I might be glad to leave the situation at the end of the three months, when it would be a distinct misfortune for me to have my family on my hands and to find myself without an occupation; and it would be both cheaper and more politic for my mother to remain in Valencia until my father's affairs were completely wound up and his claim on the Government settled.

As luck would have it, there was no time for debate over this, for a steamer sailed for Marseilles the very next day, and the post went out that very

afternoon. I resolved, therefore, to return to England alone, and I wrote to Sir Ralph Grimston, that I expected to reach London on such a date, and that I would, without unnecessary delay, travel on to Ashdown, telegraphing from town at what hour I might be expected.

CHAPTER II.

THE VISION FROM THE TRAIN.

The passage from Calais to Dover was rough, and I am not a good sailor. It was, therefore, in disgust and weariness that I entered the waiting train at Dover late in the afternoon. I made a financial arrangement with the guard, was locked alone into a second-class compartment, laid myself out on one of the seats, and went to sleep. I had scarcely slept since I had left Valencia, three days before. I did not wake till the train stopped and my ticket was demanded at Herne Hill. Thence I sat up and, in a condition something between sleep and wake, looked from the window upon the lighted backs of houses which we whirled by on our way to Holborn Viaduct. I was cold and hungry, and even the squalor which I knew must prevail in many of these houses did not prevent me from finding them suggestive of the warmth and plenty of an English home. Behind the glowing blinds of the windows I imagined the bright light, the cosy

fire with the kettle on the hob, and the restful lounge with a pipe and a book between tea and supper.

As I looked, and as the impression more and more held me that the houses were madly rushing by and that we were stationary, there came over against me a blindless window, through which I saw into a well-lit room. I started up and cried aloud I know not what; for I saw a tall man, with a crop of dark hair leap to his feet, seize another by the throat, strike him on the head, and then fling him from him. That was all. The vision was whisked away, and I found myself staring at more and still more quiet, blinded windows. I sat down and shuddered. Could it be that what I had seen was an hallucination of my weary, half-asleep brain? If it were not, if it were reality—had the tall, dark man committed murder, or had he struck in self-defence?

When Holborn Viaduct was reached I was so dazed I could scarce look after my luggage, and I hung about so full and moved with what I had seen (which, listen as I might, I could not discover that another had seen) that I felt I must impart it to someone. But everyone seemed busy and gruff (for the train was very late), and I carried my se-

cret with me out of the station. When I reached the street I came upon a sergeant of police. I halted with intent to tell him my story ; but I quickly bethought me, "I cannot say at what point it was between the Thames and Herne Hill, and if I could, I should be kept in town to give evidence. Moreover, *he* is of the city police and has nothing to do with what happens over the water." I passed on, and resolved, therefore, to keep my story till I could impart it to the landlord or the waiter of the little hotel to which I was going for the night.

There is nothing, I find, makes a man more selfish than comfort after cheerlessness, plenty after want. When I had filled myself with food and drink in the neighborhood of a bright fire, I was less than ever inclined to incur the risk of making public what I had seen, more especially as I discovered that I could not afford to be delayed an instant ; I should have to take Cambridge on my way to Ashdown and spend an hour or so there, and in order to do that I found from *Bradshaw* I must depart by a very early train. I so far compromised with my conscience, however, as to tell the landlord what I had seen. I was relieved and fortified by his opinion that if a crime had been committed

in an inhabited house it would soon be detected without my aid. After that I went to bed and slept; but my sleep was disturbed by a phantasmagoria of vivid and painful dreams.

I rose early and continued my journey. I spent an hour or two at Cambridge, and in consequence did not reach Ashdown till dark.

For some distance before the station was reached the railway ran along an embankment, so that I had a tolerable view of the land I was entering. A low-lying land, it was, on the whole, gently undulating toward the horizon, with one swollen hillock at the sky-line, wood-clad and surmounted by a pillar or cross—in the waning light I could not determine which. The landscape on one side was thickly wooded, too thickly wooded for productive agriculture, and on the other sodden and marshy, with a winding, shining stream, kept within bounds by sloping dykes, on which here and there grew shock-headed willows. The sombre russet of the dying foliage on the one hand, shaded and subdued by the evening mist, and the thickening, whitening street of marsh-fog on the other, with not a spark of light anywhere, produced a chilling, depressing effect upon me. I wished myself back in the cheerful bustle and illumination of London.

As I thought, however, of the lights of London, I recalled the tragic tableau I had seen the night before (or dreamed ; for with the changes and excitements of the day it had faded into something like unreality), and remembering it, I shuddered.

I was cheered a little by the sight of the lamps—the paraffin lamps—of the station, and I descended from the train with alacrity. A weedy youth, who seemed all jacket and legs, wandered along the platform, calling "*Ashdown!*" with a dismal howling prolongation of the last syllable. I was the only person who left the train, and, when it went snorting away and I stood forth with my luggage a noticeable figure, the youth came and looked at me with a kind of melancholy surprise, and looked at my baggage.

"I am going to Sir Ralph Grimston's," said I.

"Sally!" called the youth, with a turn over his shoulder, but with his eyes still on me.

"What's now?" answered a thin, angry-looking woman, appearing with dripping arms at the door of the little station-house.

"He's gooin' to Sir Rafe's!" said the youth.

"Oh!" exclaimed the woman.

"Is there no vehicle—no trap of any sort—come for me?" I asked.

They both slowly shook their heads as in wonder at the question.

"Nay," said the woman.

"What am I to do then?" said I. "I suppose I must leave this big portmanteau in your charge, and walk? Is it far?"

"About three mile. Joe here'll show th' way."

I thanked her.

"Hast a return ticket?" she asked.

"No," said I, producing the ticket I had. "I've come to stay."

"Nay," said she. "Nobody iver stays wi' Sir Rafe. If I was in your place, I'd bide here, and tak' next train back."

"I don't think I can do that," said I, forcing a laugh.

But she seemed to hear neither my words nor my laugh; she was on her way back to her wash-tub. I was troubled very deeply, but I turned to the youth as cheerfully as I could, saying, "Well, Joe, I suppose we had better be moving."

"Yea," said Joe. "It woan't be long afore it's dark."

"It seems to me dark already," said I.

"Nay," said Joe; "it'll be darkner nor this."

When we left the station and its lights I found

that Joe was right ; it was not yet so dark as it would be. But we had not gone very far before it became very dark indeed, because of the dense overshadowing of trees. For some time it was positively painful for me to strive to see my way and to attempt to distinguish between one thing and another. Joe, however, trudged securely on, and I kept by him. I think that those who are little used to artificial light have a keener eyesight than those who are seldom or never in darkness (save when they are asleep). Though my eyes soon grew so habituated to the dark that I did not blunder and splash quite blindly on, yet throughout that long walk they never saw plainly and shrewdly as did Joe's.

"What trees are these that grow over us, Joe?" I asked.

"They'se hashes," answered Joe, "wi' some halders among 'em."

"Oh," said I, "that's why, of course, you call the place Ashdown?"

"Nay," said a countryman who suddenly turned up on the other side of Joe, trudging along with a tall staff; "it bain't, maister; no more'n halders makes haldermen. This parish is Hashdown, because 'undreds of years ago the Hall and the woods

round about was wunst laid in hashes by a mad Grimston. Every man-jack o' the Grimstons is mad, but that 'un, I believe, was madder than ony."

"But what," I asked, with a keen and palpitating interest, "did he set fire to the Hall for?"

"Just fro' mad devil'ry, maister, I s'pose," said the countryman. "They do say as 'ow he wuz a black wizard, not meanin' as 'ow he wuz black i' the face, but as 'ow he did beastly black, fearsome things. I've heard as 'ow he cud mak' th' great black devil come and go, just like Jack in th' box."

"But," said I, with a questioning note in my voice, "Sir Ralph's not like that?"

"Bain't he, maister? Happen thou knows him?"

"Nay," said Joe, answering for me; "'e's just come, and 'e's goin' to Sir Rafe's; I's takin' him."

"Happen," said the countryman, coming with his tall staff between me and Joe—"happen thou'rt a new apprentice?"

"Secretary," said I, rather offended.

"Ah, yea," said he, "a man as writes no end o' letters, and 'begs to inform,' and a' that kind o'

thing. Now I wouldn' ha' thowt Sir Rafe had piles o' letters to write."

"I really can't tell you," said I, resenting his boorish intrusion and inquisitiveness; "and I don't think I'd tell you if I could."

"Sure-ly!" said the man, in simple wonder.

"Sir Rafe," said Joe, "do have a-many letters, and tallygrafts, too; for our Bill tak's 'em; our Bill's the postman."

"Oh, he do—do he?" said the countryman. "Good-neight, maister—good-neight."

We had just entered a straggling, melancholy little village—or so I judged from the ale-house, for whose lighted doorway the countryman made—the wheelwright's shed with its ruck of broken carts and disconsolate and unmatched wheels, and the half-dozen blear-eyed cottages on this side and on that.

"Who is that fellow?" I asked of Joe.

"Nay," said Joe; "I don't know."

"Do you mean," said I, "that you never saw him before?"

"Yea," said Joe; "I saw him afore—wunst, when he got out o' th' train and gi'e me his ticket; he coom by th' two-forty."

"And you don't know who he is?"

"Don't know him from Adam, maister."

"Strange," said I, "he should fasten on us like that."

"Wanted company, I s'pose," said Joe.

I had reason to remember that countryman's desire for company.

CHAPTER III.

THE DESERTED HOUSE.

Joe and I tramped on in silence, clear of the village, on past hedges, and hay-stacks, and corn-ricks (the difference between which was only evident in the dark by the dank sweet smell that came from the former), then again under the shade of overhanging trees, and on, still on. And the nearer I got to The Wythes the heavier I became, not only of foot, but also in heart ; for it seemed to become clearer and clearer to me as I added step to step along the miry road that no welcome awaited me. I began to speculate more anxiously than I had yet done what manner of man Sir Ralph might be, and what sort of household he maintained. I considered all the gossip I had listened to, and the abominable, depressing fact that I had been allowed to find my way as best I could, baggage and all, along the heaviest and worst kept road in the kingdom, and I almost wished I had a return ticket.

I was most daunted and taken aback, however, when Joe stopped and put down my bag before a great iron gate, set between two square stone pillars, surmounted by some kind of heraldic beast, that looked against the gray sky, all teeth, and tongue, and claws. He pulled a hanging handle, and some little way within a reluctant bell set up a loud clanging.

"This is the place, then, I suppose?" said I.

"A'most," answered Joe. "It's a tidy bit yet, I b'lieve, to th' Hall."

"You believe?" I said. "Don't you know?"

"Nay," said Joe; "I never been."

"But you're coming now?" I demanded in some alarm. "Aren't you?"

"Nay, not I."

"And how," I said, "am I to carry this baggage and find my way by myself?"

"I d'n' know."

"What's to do?" asked a female voice from within the gates.

I turned and saw through the gate-bars what appeared a girl of thirteen or so, except that she did not wear the short frock of a girl.

"I am Sir Ralph's new secretary," said I.

"Oh, yea," said the little female; "he did say

summat a day or two ago about a new young man comin'." And she opened the gate.

"Can't this lad come with me," I asked, "up to the house to help carry my luggage?"

"Nay, not I!" said Joe, withdrawing to the middle of the road, as if afraid of compulsion. "I woan't go to Sir Rafe's—no, not for money!"

"Sir Rafe," said the little female, "cannot abide folk passin' th' gates. It's like 'No admittance 'cept on business.'"

"I bain't going to no Sir Rafe's," repeated Joe; "not I."

So I paid him for his service, took up my baggage, and the next moment the Grimston gates closed upon me. The little woman's phrase, "a day or two ago," hung in my ear, and when she led me into the little lodge that stood back among the trees (I saw, as she walked before me into the light, that her hair was gray and that she must be very bandy-legged), I demanded whether Sir Ralph had not received my telegram that morning.

"Tallygram?" said she, pointing to a side-table. "There's tallygram came this marnin'."

I took it up; it was still sealed.

"Sir Ralph," said I, "has not seen it, then?"

"Nay," said she, turning to me (she was a

squint-eyed, thin-mouthed old woman). "Sir Rafe never sees no letters nor tallygrams, 'cept i' the mornin', when I takes 'em up, unless he steps down here i' th' day-time. But he hain't been down to-day."

"He won't expect me, then?" said I.

"'Twould be just th' same if he did," said she, moving to the door with the evident intention of sending me off.

"Is there no one about," I said, "to help me to carry these things?"

"Nay," said she; "I ha' nobbut mysen" (by which I understood her to mean "none but myself"). "You can leave summat, if you like, an' I'll bring it up i' th' mornin'."

I thanked her, and left in her charge a bundle of wraps that encumbered me.

"And now," said I, "how am I to reach the house?"

"Right along th' avenue," said she. "It winds a bit. There's a short cut through here, but you'd never find it."

"And how far is it by the avenue?" I asked, for I was very tired.

"'Bout a mile," said she. "Don't leave the road, 'cause there's a pool, and two—three—gravel-pits, you might step into."

I soon found that but for the line of trees on either hand I might have easily wandered from the avenue; for it was so overgrown with grass as to seem to the foot completely turf-covered. This and the frequent breaks in the line of trees suggested more than the possibility of losing the way; it suggested also, that for a long time the Grimstons must have been a poverty-stricken house, exercising freely the last resource of desperate landlords for the payment of debts. I was so influenced by this new depressing consideration that I began to wonder whether Sir Ralph would be able to pay me the £200 a year I had bargained for.

As I trudged on with weary feet and heavy heart, my hands weighed down by my luggage, the moon appeared over the tops of the trees, dispelling the clouds, but leaving the white mist clinging to the ground and breast-high about the trees, the soft beauty and peacefulness of her light soothed and cheered me, and I continued my way with better heart. Presently a bend in the avenue brought me in view of the Hall, and I stopped a moment to gaze. It stood on an open rising ground, white, gaunt, and mysterious, in the moonlight. I know nothing of architecture, so I cannot

say in what style it was built. Its figuration was rather high than wide, with angles and corners which produced deep effects of shadow, so that, as I say, the impression on me was gauntness—gauntness and cold; for nowhere was any light visible, and my cheerfulness vanished.

I walked on wondering, with my eyes fixed on the windows—of which there were a good many, some shuttered, but most unshuttered—but at none could I perceive so much as a hint of the glimmer of a taper. I glanced at the lank chimneys, but from none could I see the issue of any smoke. Perplexed—strangely moved and alarmed—I approached the great hall-door. I pulled the bell-handle; it was rusty and stiff, and no sound ensued upon my pull. I pulled again with all my might, and then I trembled for what I had done. The bell—far within—set up a rusty, hoarse, clamorous peal, which sounded as if, having begun, it would not leave off till forcibly stopped. It clanged, and clanged, and clanged again; and then suddenly its horrible echo beat more loudly on my ear through a door that had been opened within. I immediately expected to hear swiftly approaching feet, and to see the hall-door open, with the demand—perhaps, from the formidable Sir Ralph himself—why that

hideous bell had been set ringing so clamorously. But no one came. I listened; but there was no sound save the dying and isolated "Clang! clang!" of the bell. Yet I was certain a door had been opened within; I had not heard it open, but I was sure the louder sound of the bell could only have come through a newly opened door. I am not ashamed to say that the mystery of it smote me, strung up as I was, with something like terror. I waited I cannot say how long; but there came neither sound nor sight of living creature. Yet there was surely someone lurking within. I was afraid to ring the bell again, though I was determined not to go away. I stood and waited, quickly cooling in the chilly, damp air. At length I laid my hand on the big door-handle. The latch turned, and I was appalled to find the door yield to a slight push and noiselessly swing open. I pushed it wide, and waited and gazed into the yawning gulf of blackness. The hall was all dark, save the yard or so on the threshold lighted by the moon. I summoned all my resolution, and entered with thumping heart, leaving the door open, and my luggage on the step.

I felt in my pocket for matches. In my waistcoat I found two wax lights. Lest the draught

should blow the light out once I had struck it, I returned and put the heavy hall-door to without latching it. I then stepped carefully a little way into the hall, so that I might have the better chance of reaching a candle or lamp before my light went out. I had just struck the first of my two matches—it had scarcely flamed up—when I felt something touch my leg and brush past me. Completely startled, I dropped the match. I have read that there is more than one kind of courage. I have always found that in the extremity of dread comes such a stiffening of the nerves as may well serve for complete self-possession. When I stood there in utter darkness, assailed by dangers which I knew not, I bethought me that I should be very careful in striking my last match. It then occurred to me that I probably had more matches in the Gladstone bag, in which I had deposited, among other odds and ends for my journey, my pipe and tobacco. I retreated to the door and, with some relief, opened it wide again. I staggered under a fresh blow to my nerves.

The door-step was bare: both my travelling-bags were gone!

That was so far reassuring in that it convinced me there must be a human being in my immediate

neighborhood. I rushed out into the moonlight, and ran this way and then that, around the house ; but neither sight nor sound of living creature greeted me. My pace was sobered, and I was again struck with the mystery of the all-pervading silence. The ample conservatories stood cold and vacant. The stables were open, and empty, and swept, and the few handfuls of straw in the yard were old and bleached, and mouldering. There was neither trace nor sound of beast or man. I was convinced, therefore, that whosoever had removed or stolen my bags must be keeping close somewhere about the house ; though it was impossible to trace foot-marks in the vague moonlight upon the hard gravel. Encouraged by this conviction that I had only flesh and blood to contend with, I returned to the hall-door, resolved to risk my sole remaining match.

I entered and advanced briskly, but carefully, without leaving myself pause for reflection. When I thought I was well beyond the reach of draught, I struck my match, shielding it with my hat. When it burned up, and illumined the circumscribed area about me, the first thing my eye lighted on was, close to my elbow, the bronze bust, life-size, of a handsome well-bearded man in the

prime of life. My next glance revealed to me a candle, in a heavy, old-fashioned silver candlestick, on an oak table hard by; and to that I quickly applied my light. At the same instant I was startled again by something brushing against my leg. I looked hastily down and saw the largest black cat I had ever set eyes on. He had some of the points of the untamable wild-cat: his forelegs were muscular, and over his lower lip there protruded two pointed fangs. But what most of all made him look sinister and fiendish, was a stiff tuft of hair that grew like a horn from the base of either ear. His aspect, however, seemed more ferocious than his nature; for he purred loudly as he rubbed himself against my leg, and when I murmured "puss," he raised his head and showed his great orange eyes touched with quite a kindly light. At any rate, alone and shaken as I was, I gladly accepted his advances of friendliness.

I stood there a little, not knowing what to do. To say I was bewildered suggests little of the turmoil of feeling and fancy in which I was involved. When I thought that there must be human beings in or about the house somewhere, anger contended with dread in me; for I could not guess

whether this exceedingly inhospitable reception I had met with was the grim, practical joke of my new employer, or whether serious harm was not intended against me (for what reason or purpose I could not guess) by the eccentric Sir Ralph, who might, by all accounts, very well be as mad as certain of his ancestors. I shuddered as I thought of the dread alternative. It might be my fate to be pounced upon from some shadowy corner, and throttled or stabbed, once I began to move about the house. A horrible reluctance held me; and yet I was piqued to think that only some common thief might after all be lurking near, perhaps grinning at my terror.

I took up the candle, and again its light led my eyes to the bronze bust. A fine fighting head it carried, defiantly poised, with a closely-trimmed beard and flowing mustache. I was the more interested in it when I perceived some lettering on its base, and read "Ralph Grimston." Was that how the present "eccentric" Sir Ralph looked when he was young?

I turned away, and held the candle high to see better into the obscurity of the lofty hall. On either hand were portraits of gentlemen and ladies that scowled disdainfully or smiled haughtily,

stared vacantly or gazed indifferently. As I eagerly glanced from one to another in the dim candle-light, each and all seemed to resent my impertinent gaze and to demand what I meant by disturbing their dead serenity. I shuddered among all these Grimstons; for there was not one, male or female, that had a look of simple human kindness.

There was a heavy brass-handled door on either side of the hall. The one was closed, the other half open. I stepped quietly (as quietly as I could with the cat twining about my legs) to the open door and peeped in. It was a large room, with a heavy, carved oaken table in the centre littered with books and papers: there was no other sign of recent occupation, and the serried portraits glaring from the walls drove me out. A wide staircase rose from the further end of the hall, after a short flight branching this way and that to a gallery, which I could just distinguish, above. I ascended it to the parting of the ways, my footsteps falling noiseless on the thick-pile carpet; but when I had got so far, the gloomy aspect of the gallery, of the gloomy corridors running this way and that, and of a still loftier flight of stairs beyond, daunted me completely, and I descended to

the hall, the rather that Sir Ralph had warned me against being too inquisitive, and that the dread of someone following me close behind—of an assassin prepared to leap on my back and plunge his knife to my heart—was ever present with me.

I was weary and sick with expectation and fatigue. Where could I go to rest for the night? It seemed idle to look for food and drink. All I could hope to secure was a place to lie down in, and the chance of escape in the morning. I was tempted toward a baize-covered door that stood ajar in the recess beyond the foot of the staircase. I pushed it a little farther open and looked within—a passage lined with doors, opening, no doubt, upon the kitchen, pantry, and other offices; but since my enemy might lurk behind any one of those doors, I dare not venture into the passage, the less that I saw in the distance, hanging from the wall, the bell no doubt which I had rung. It still trembled from the pull I gave it.

I turned away in desperation, closing the door *and locking it*, and went (the cat always accompanying me) straight to the door on the left of the hall, which I had not yet tried. The latch yielded at once. I entered, shading the light with my hand. The room, from the elegance and richness

of its furniture, I judged to be the drawing-room. I had taken up and looked at a large photograph I had found on the floor—of a handsome girl, with spirited poise of head, and straight, frank look. I was thinking that here I might very comfortably pass the night, and was moving over the soft carpet to inspect an ample sofa, when a dark figure rose before me. I turned quickly to the window, and there staring in upon me was a man in slouched hat and heavy cloak. My nerves could endure no more. “Oh, my God!” I cried, and staggered and sank in unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IV.

BETSY LOMAX.

I returned to consciousness with dreary daylight about me. It was with difficulty that I recalled how I came to be lying there. My experiences of the night before would have been set down by me as a hideous, disordered dream, were it not that I lay as I had fallen on the carpet, with the silver candlestick close to my hand. I suppose that, overcome with fatigue and the successive shocks of surprise and dread, I had dropped in a faint, and had thence passed into a heavy torpid sleep. Thankful for such natural relief, I sat up and became conscious of a little headache and an enormous hunger. I looked at my watch, it was still going, and marked half-past six. I resolved to go in search of something to eat, in spite of my extreme dread of the house. I was about to cross the threshold when the little old woman of the gate appeared before me.

"Well, now," she said, "I was wonderin' what could be to do in here. Hast a not been in bed, young man?"

"No," said I; "I found no one here last night, and I didn't care to go wandering all over the house to find the bedroom that might be meant for me."

"I warrant you didna. So you just lay down where you could! Well, I don't blame you. Th' Grimston ale's strong i' the stomach, and weak i' the yed. It mak's you sleep well, and gi'es a forgetful mind. Dost think wheer you left th' luggage last night?"

"What? Have you found it?" I asked.

"Found it? It didna need so much findin'. It was on th' doorstep."

"They put it back, then," I said half to myself.

"*They!—put back!*" she repeated. "You mean it was took away, I s'pose?"

"Certainly I do," said I.

"Now," said she, shaking at me a forefinger like a nutmeg-grater, "don't you go for to tak' away my character, young man. I ha' been long about Sir Ralph, and my word'll be ta'en afore yours."

"My good woman," said I, "I don't for a moment suppose you had anything to do with the

foolish trick of taking my things away, just for the fun of putting them back."

"Who do you mean, then? Tell me that. Who d'you mean? And doan't go for to 'good woman' me. My name's Betsy Lomax, and as good a name as yours, till I know th' contrar'."

"A better name than mine," said I, "which is only Halliday. But we've nothing to quarrel about, Betsy. I never supposed you had anything to do with the disappearance of my luggage; and I dare say I only dreamed it was lost."

"More likely th' Grimston ale you had to supper. But don't you go for to say it again."

"I've tasted neither ale nor anything else in this house yet," said I, "which is why I would ask you, Betsy, to help me to get some breakfast as soon as possible, for I'm famishing."

"Now, Mr. 'Alltheday!" cried the fierce little woman, "there you be again! I really think you be the falsest and brazenest young man I ever see! First you go for to tell me you lost your luggage, and lo! I finds it on the doorstep; and then, like winkin' and not so much as a blush, you says, says you, 'Betsy, I ain't 'ad nary a bit o' supper,' says you, when I just come from washin' up your plate, and the cat's this minute a-goin' at your two chop-

bones on the kitchen floor! Now don't do it! Don't you do it! I woan't be made fun o' by 'All-thedays i' th' year!"

"Really, you astonish me, Betsy," said I.

"Happen I do. I astonish most folk when I begin, though I be a little 'un."

"But, truly—on my word, my oath—any oath you like—I tasted nothing last night! I was too tired, and—I didn't know where to look for anything."

I said that because I did not care to say I was frightened, and because I feared to excite again her anger by suggesting that a stranger might have entered the house. "Don't you think," I continued, "it might have been Sir Ralph's supper that you cleared away. I suppose he must be somewhere in the house, though I have not seen him."

"I doan't think it was ought o' th' sort. Sir Ralph wasn't at 'ome—leastways, his bed ain't been slept in, and he's eat no food here; and happen," said she, with a quick glance of suspicious cunning, "you know that as well as I do."

"I know nothing," said I, desperately. "I came to find Sir Ralph, and to begin the duties I am engaged for; and I have found nobody—not even a servant. Does Sir Ralph live in this house all alone?" I asked.

"Mostlins," said she.

"Well," said I, "I am really fainting with hunger, Betsy; and if you can——" I put half a crown in her hand, and her manner changed at once from asperity and suspicion to smoothness and frank hospitality.

"Coom, lad," said she, with a cunning twinkle and a snap of thumb and finger. "I'll find you summat. Look—see, I've brought the bass in. Coom i' the kitchen. Parlors here, parlors there, says I, but gi'e me a comfor'ble kitchen."

And, in truth, the great kitchen did look comfortable. A good fire was already burning in the ample grate, its red light playing pleasantly on bright copper pans and white dish-covers. The only thing that reminded me of my horrors of the night before was the devilish-looking black cat, which sat before the fire licking his lips; and even he in the morning light looked less terrible than comic with his protruding fangs and his horns of hair.

"He's a strange-looking cat," said I to Betsy, when she came forward to put the kettle on.

"You mean Cloots?" said she.

"Is that his name?" I asked.

"Yes," said she: "that's Sir Ralph's name for 'im, and rare fond he is o' 'im. There used to be

more like 'um out about. Half wild-cat they say they be. They's a queer breed, but Cloots is the last of 'em. They say they ha' been wi' th' Grimstons sin' the beginning, and they'll be wi' them till th' end; amen."

"A kind of familiar spirit," said L. "And have they all had hairy horns like Cloots?"

"Nay," said she; "I never heerd o' none but him. But now you come wi' me," she continued, taking up a carving-knife, "and see wheer th' victuals is, unless," said she, with a quick look of suspicion, "you know already. Happen you may ha' a day or two by yoursen here."

That anticipation, I must confess, caused me a shiver, and made me resolve to be as agreeable as possible to Betsy. I went with her out of the kitchen and down a flight of steps and through a heavy door into a great cellar, half underground. It was cold down there, but fairly dry, and in the dim light filtered through several gratings I could see hanging from the ceiling great hams and sides of bacon, and on stone tables eggs and butter, and apples and pears, and I wondered what for one man the house should be so lavishly provisioned. Betsy walked to a half carcass that hung in a corner, and I followed her.

"Now," said she, turning on me, "tell me who cut them chops if you didn't."

"Betsy," said I, firmly, "this is the first time I've been in this cellar."

"Well," said she, "let be. We can talk about it i' th' kitchen. How many chops will you have?"

"Mutton—is it?" I asked.

"Mutton it is," said she. "How many?"

"I think, Betsy," said I, "you'd better cut four, and I shall be very much obliged if you'll sit down to breakfast with me."

"Oh, Mr. 'Alltheday," said she, "I couldn' think o' such a thing. I'll mak' breakfast for you, and welcome, but as for sittin' down wi' you——"

But in spite of her protestation, I saw she was pleased; and I was pleased, too, for the feeling that in a little while I would be again alone in that great house with its silence and its mystery impelled me to make as much as possible of such human company as I had.

She cut the four chops, sawing through the bone with a saw that hung at hand, with remarkable despatch, and we returned to the kitchen.

"Please to shet that cellar-door, Mr. 'Alltheday," said she, and tripped up the steps with the alacrity of a girl.

When we were in the full light of the kitchen I looked at her closely, and discovered to my surprise that she could not be nearly so old as I had at first supposed ; she might be any age, but probably she was little more than thirty. She was gray-haired, and she was thin ; but she was active and wiry. The lines of age, too, which I had believed I had remarked the night before, were smoothed away, and her face looked positively radiant. As she deftly proceeded with the cooking, and glanced at me and smiled, a dreadful suspicion forced itself on me—I do not think it was my conceit—that I was being fallen in love with. Poor lonely Betsy ! She had a woman's soft heart after all, which promptly responded to what, I suppose, she considered my kindness. But there was nothing obtrusive or offensive in the kindly looks she gave me in return.

“ Look you 'ere, Mr. 'Alltheday,” she said ; “ I'm allas about doin' up i' th' mornin', and whenever you want a nice bit o' breakfast early a' by yoursen, you just let me know.”

I had an overpowering curiosity to learn what I could about the house and its ways. So, when we sat together over breakfast, with Cloots between us, and Betsy seemed easy and pleased, I said, “ Tell

me, Betsy, truly : do you think there is anybody in this house now besides ourselves ?" I was amazed at the unfortunate result of my question.

"Oh," she cried, dropping her knife, "there you be again, Mr. 'Alltheday ! Just when I felt so comfor'able wi' you, you ups and axes about things I don't want to think about ! Oh, don't you do it ! Don't do it, I say !"

Her distress was clearly very real. I murmured that I was sorry for having troubled her, but I meant no harm.

"And hasn't Sir Rafe said you mustn' be inquisitive ? He says it to everybody. And what's that but bein' inquisitive ? It's a dreadful place to be in, and Sir Rafe's a dreadful man to be wi' !" she continued, pouring out her troubles in a jerky, wild stream. "Folk in and folk out, day and night—men always—men little and men big—genteel men and common men, all sorts and sizes—but I mustn' tak' no notice ! An' its hard to mak' believe you ain't seen nought nor nobody, when you 'ave ! It's hard to shet my e'en an' mak' believe there ain't been nobbut you i' this blessed kitchen last night, when I seen plenty signs that there hes."

"But why," I said, quietly, "should you try to

deceive yourself about it, and pretend there was nobody here last night but me ? ”

“ Now,” she exclaimed, “ don’t you go for to say it. Don’t you say it ! Or I’ll never speak to you again ! If I wunst let mysen b’lieve what you say, I’d allus be believin’ I saw folk and things, and then I couldn’ hold but speak about it, and Sir Rafe would ha’ me up like blue murder.”

“ Is Sir Ralph such a terrible man, then ? ”

“ Ter’ble ain’t th’ word for’t ! He’s just—I don’ know what—*screwgious* ! He’s got such a look of fire on his red face, and e’en as could scrēw aught out on you like a gimblet ! ”

“ I suppose,” said I, “ that’s his bust in the hall ? ”

“ You mean,” said she, “ that Shakespeare thing ? Yea, that’s hisn, when he was a young man. ’Twas made in France, they say.”

“ He’s an old man now, of course ? ” said I.

“ Old he may be, but he’s stronger and heartier than anybody,” she answered with reluctance, but with an evident sense of finding relief as she proceeded. “ You ain’t seen ’im ? If you wunst set e’en on him, you woan’t forget ’im—a grit big man, tall and broad wi’t, wi’ a grit head o’ white hair, a rosy face, and white beard ; a ter’ble fine man Sir Rafe is ! ”

"And hasn't he any family?" I asked.

"He's a son and a daughter," said she, coming near me, talking in a quicker and lower voice, and glancing on this side and that at intervals, as if she were making an indiscreet revelation, and feared the consequences; "I know 'em both. Mister Rafe's his father's darlin', but he hain't much here. He's a fine young offisher amang th' sodgers, but he doan't like his father's livin' like thisn, and that, I do believe, is th' reason why he off and went to Injia, for in Injia he is at this blessed moment. Sometimes they had words about it; for he's a wild young man, just like Sir Rafe afore un; Miss Cicely is as different as can be. She'd like to live wi' her father allus, but he woan't let her; she's mostlins wi' her aunt i' Lunnon. Sir Rafe doan't like her; he positivel' hates her, I do b'lieve. An' that's the contrar' kind o' thing what love is; for Mister Rafe is th' son o' Sir Rafe's first wife, a play-actin' woman, as a'most druv' 'im mad, and Miss Cicely's the daughter o' a good lady as wor-shipped 'im. But, then, you see, he was rare fond o' th' first wife, and not o' th' other."

At that point, when she had delivered herself of her version of the family history, emphasizing it here and there with lively and abundant gestures,

and standing before me no higher than I sat—while Cloots, the Horned Cat, sat upon a chair and blinked and purred as if he agreed with all she said, and would corroborate it if he had an intelligible voice—there sounded a loud peal of that hideous bell which I had pulled the night before. The memory of its effect on me made me start and shudder again.

“Gracious mercy!” exclaimed Betsy. “That can never be Sir Rafe! He’d never ring his own bell! Whoever can it be? What mun I do? Sir Rafe ’ll never let me see anybody as comes. Will you see who it can be, Mr. ’Alltheday?”

CHAPTER V.

THE CAMBERWELL MYSTERY.

I rose and went to "answer" the door in a considerable disarray of composure. It struck me, first of all, with anxiety that a visitor should come so early in the morning (it was not later than eight o'clock), and it appeared to me especially odd that I should take upon me to represent a house in which I had been for only a few hours, and of which I knew nothing. I opened the door, and saw a brisk-looking, close-shaven person.

"Mr. Halliday, I believe?" said he.

His straight look and his smile made my heart sink; they too intimately reminded me of the pleasant gentlemen who had sometimes presented themselves at the door of my college rooms to request the immediate payment of a bill. While wondering how on earth I had been found out at the lonely Wytches, I could not refuse to acknowledge my name.

"Yes," said I; "I am called Halliday."

"Could you favor me with a few minutes' private conversation?" said he, again impressing on me his straight look and his smile.

"May I know your name?" I asked.

"Bygrove," said he.

I thought I had heard the name before, though I could not recall any Bygrove among my own or my father's creditors; I considered, however, that perhaps he was the kind of person that serves a summons.

"Really, I don't know," said I. "I arrived here only last night——"

"I know that, Mr. Halliday," said he, with a smile.

He knew that!

—— "and I have hardly any right," continued I, "to ask a stranger into this house. Do you mind saying what you have to say out here on the gravel?"

"Well," said he, smiling again, "the publicity of the gravel hardly suits me. I think, Mr. Halliday, you might venture to ask me in, even though Sir Ralph is not at home."

He knew that, too!

I made no further objection, and led the way into the room where I had passed the night. When

we had entered he carefully closed the door, and walked into the middle of the room. He then glanced shrewdly all around him and through the window to the gravel sweep, and finally he produced from his inner pocket a paper.

“Read that, if you please,” said he.

It was a London newspaper of the day before, and was folded so as to present to the eye a large-type heading :

“MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR IN CAMBERWELL.”

A copy of the paper is before me now, and the reporter's story is as follows : “A tragedy of a mysterious character was discovered at Camberwell last night. Soon after nine o'clock, Mr. Crossman, the landlord of the Breadalbane Arms, at the corner of the Poulett Road, went to the first-floor back room, which is immediately behind the billiard-room, and which had been let for part of the evening to a party of gentlemen. It had been let for two hours, from seven to nine, and when he thought the gentlemen must be gone he went upstairs. The room was locked and the key was gone. The door was burst open, and all was discovered to be in darkness, and on striking a light the landlord was horrified to perceive a man lying on the floor between the table and the fire-place,

apparently dead, with a punctured wound on the left temple. The constable on the beat and a medical man were summoned at once, and information of the discovery was conveyed to the Camberwell police station. The local medical man pronounced life to be extinct, and Inspector Wright and other officers came with the ambulance and removed the remains to the police-station. With them came a detective who had happened to be at the station, and he at once made an examination of the room for traces of the murderer. The window, which looks out upon the London, Chatham & Dover Railway, was open, but no signs could be found of footmarks either on the window-sill or on the ground below, and the door being found locked and the key gone, suggested that the window need not have been used for the purpose of escape. It would not have been difficult to make off by the usual mode of entrance, for it appears that access has been usually had to the room, not through the public house proper, but by a private side-entrance. The house is very much frequented by some betting men, and it was by one or two of them that the room was hired on the evening in question.

“At the police-station, Dr. Wells, with Dr. Cow-

per, the divisional surgeon, made an examination of the bed. The hands were clenched, but there were no signs of a struggle, and the only wound was the discolored puncture on the left temple, penetrating to the brain, which the medical man declared to have been caused by a heavy, denting weapon, and to be sufficient to have caused death. The body was that of a good-looking man of about thirty years of age, close-shaven, with dark complexion, blue eyes, and black hair, and was well dressed. There were found in the deceased's pockets a gold watch and some money in gold and silver, but nothing that would give the slightest clew to his identity, which up to the present is undiscovered. The body will be removed to the mortuary, and an inquest will be held by the coroner for the district, probably on Wednesday or Thursday.

"The impression which prevailed last night in the neighborhood of the scene of the crime was that the murder had been committed in a quarrel over some betting transaction, though the character of the weapon that dealt the fatal blow can scarcely be guessed at. Our reporter has discovered a poor woman, a laundress by occupation, who declares that at ten minutes to eight she saw a tall dark

man with a mustache come out by the private side-door and draw the door gently to after him. They passed each other, and she used a remarkable expression in describing their meeting. 'As we passed,' said she, 'his right eye caught my left.' She is quite certain about the time, for she immediately looked into the public house to see what it was. The police authorities declare they have well-founded suspicions of the origin of the crime and of the identity of the criminal, though they are very reserved and admit that they have as yet no definite clew."

"No clew but one," said Bygrove, when he saw I had finished my reading.

"And that one?" I asked.

"A scrap of paper with the signature '*Ralph Grimston*,' which I found tight-locked in the hand of the man."

"You are, then?"

"A detective from Scotland Yard, at your service;" saying which he laid on the table before me his card.

"And do you mean you suspect Sir Ralph Grimston of the murder?" I asked.

"Not exactly," he answered.

"I don't know what you suspect," I said, "but

it is possible I may be able to throw a little light on the affair."

"I expect you may; that's why I am here," he said, with a note of emphasis in his voice, but no look of emphasis on his face. I wondered what he might mean.

"Yes," said I, "I am pretty sure I can. Do the back windows of the tavern look upon the railway, as the report says?"

"They do," he answered.

"Then," said I, "I believe I saw something of it;" and I told him what I had seen from the train on the night in question and about half-past seven of the clock.

"A tall, dark man," said he; "that's interesting; that confirms the woman's story. The landlord of the public house says the man that hired the room was a fair, rosy, farmer-looking man. Only he may not have told the truth; I suspect him of knowing more than he tells, and I've suspected his house for a long time."

And he gave me a singularly deep, straight look. "However," he continued, "this is not business. I must be in town this afternoon for further inquiry. That's why I've troubled you so early. You wonder why I should have troubled you at all."

He paused and looked at me : I said nothing, because I saw no necessity for speech ; and he continued. " Well, I don't reckon myself at liberty to go over all the reasons ; but I'll tell you what I can. In case you would have been thinking of getting out of this double-quick, now that you see where you are and how you are landed——"

" I *was* thinking of that," I replied, without quite taking in his last words.

" Well," said he, laying his hand emphatically on my arm, " I take the liberty of particularly requesting you not to go ; you'll find it very well worth your while to stay. You perfectly understand me, I think."

" I don't at all," said I, " I assure you."

" It's a pity you should say that," said he, with a slow wink which amazed me. " This is going to be a big affair. Sir Ralph has not been seen here—it is difficult to say for how long, because even when he is at home he is so much of a hermit, but the little old woman down at the gate, who keeps the place tidy for him, says his bed has not been slept in for three nights. That, however, doesn't seem much to go by, because as often as not he passes the night on the sofa in his study ; and there is a curious thing that goes against the three nights'

absence, and that is, that not yesterday morning, but the morning before, she put his letters as usual on his study table and *they were taken*: yesterday morning there were no letters delivered. Though he very often goes to town I find, yet I think he can hardly have gone this time, for he has not been seen at any of the stations—neither at Ashdown, where you came to, nor at Wintop, over the hill there, on the other line, nor at the Junction, farther along. The question, then, is, ‘Where is he?’ I particularly wish to know, and so, I should think, do you; for he ought to have been here to receive you. Perhaps you would say, ‘He may be about the house or its neighborhood all the time.’”

“Just what I would say,” said I.

“Come, now, no you wouldn’t,” said he. “Why should Sir Ralph hide, especially in his own house?”

“He seems to be a mad, eccentric person,” said I.

“Yes,” said the detective, “seems to be. But there’s method in his madness, as there was in Hamlet’s, and as you ought to know. But now I am saying all this to you in confidence, because you are going to be steadily on the spot, making a note of everything. I wish I could stay here myself

now; but I can't. I want you, if you please, Mr. Halliday, to make a very careful note of everybody that comes here till I see you, or you hear from me again; there's more depends on it than you may think, and the curious thing is that you seem just plumped down here on purpose."

"I am, then," I said, "to act as a spy on the premises. I don't like it; I can't do it."

"It will be very well worth your while," he repeated; "you'll do yourself no harm, and you'll manage this job. It's something, in a fix like this, to come across a man that has his head screwed on straight."

"You flatter me," said I; "and I'm much obliged to you. But I can't promise to help you."

"You'd better not say that," he said. "I know all about you, you know."

"And how much is all?" I asked, both puzzled and nettled. "And what is there for you to know that I need be afraid of? for I suppose that you imply that there is."

"I'll tell you presently, Mr. Halliday. But first will you look at that signature"—it was the scrap he had held up as taken from the hand of the man—"and tell me whether, to the best of your knowl-

edge and belief, it is the signature of Sir Ralph Grimston."

"I have seen Sir Ralph's signature only once," said I.

"Only once?" queried he. "Still, let's hear what you think."

"Well," said I, "so far as I can tell, that is Sir Ralph's signature; the capital 'R' and the capital 'G' are odd and quite in his style."

I was about to turn the scrap over to look at the back, when he exclaimed:

"Not that side, not yet."

So I handed him the paper back.

"Now," said he, coaxingly, "you know as well as I do what all this means, and you're going, aren't you, to give me your word to keep your eye for me on what happens here till I come back?"

"I am not, indeed," said I.

"I don't like to threaten," said he; "but I believe there are penalties attaching to the refusal to help an officer of the law when he calls for help. Besides, Mr. Halliday, you should be careful to do away with a very plain suspicion."

"Mr. Bygrove," said I, striving to be calm and patient, "we've talked some time, but we don't seem to understand each other. You have some-

how got to know my name, but you seem to know nothing more of me than that. You have mistaken your man; you are supposing me to be someone else."

"Oh, yes," said he, with a smile of irritating self-sufficiency; "I think I know you. Your name is Halliday — H-a-double l-i-d-a-y — and a little while ago you went to Spain, where Sir Ralph Grimston and other men I know of keep up constant communications. I don't know if you went direct on Sir Ralph's business——"

"I knew nothing of Sir Ralph then," said I. "I went because my father was dead."

"But," he continued, taking no account of my interruption, "you came back at once when he told you to come. He wrote you a damn mad letter: I haven't got the key of it yet, but I will get it. But back you came, and here you are—*under suspicion*, Mr. Halliday."

"May I ask," said I, "where you got all this strange history of me?"

"Partly from yourself, Mr. Halliday," said he. "You were foolish enough to get into talk last night with a yokel on your way from the station, and you left your bags on the doorstep."

"Oh," said I, "that's it, is it?"

"And now," he said, "you either know all the business of Sir Ralph and the gang, or you're a green hand that's been robbed for their own purposes. I give you the benefit of the doubt, and tell you this much—if you don't know it—that you've got mixed up with the flyest set of scoundrels going, and that you'd better clear yourself of suspicion by staying here awhile and being useful."

It has been often enough said that innocence may look liker guilt than guilt itself. At that moment, when I realized the view the detective had all along had of me, and I perceived the plausibility of it, I saw I was caught in a damning coil of circumstance. My first feeling was a vague but poignant alarm; my next was a resolve to set matters right.

"You are right only in one or two points," said I, and I proceeded to tell the detective the true and simple story of my going to Spain and my coming thence. He listened to me, however, with a sweet smile of incredulity, looking at me out of the corners of his eyes, and gently shaking his head. He said nothing, but he clearly meant, "I know that story: I've heard it before. But it won't do."

"Don't you believe me?" I demanded, with hot indignation surging up in me.

"Oh," said he, "I wouldn't say I don't believe you; but it's a case where evidence is needed, and you haven't got any—have you?—not at hand, at least. I'll inquire, of course, into all you've said when I'm up in town, but in the meantime you'll have to stay here."

"I'll *not* stay here," said I, in anger so extreme that I scarce knew what to say. "Whether I've got drawn here by villains or not I'm free of the engagement that brought me here, for there's no one to receive me; and now, whether you're a detective or not, I'm going out of this, and I defy you to hinder me!" I drew my revolver from my pocket. "I'm going to get my property, and walk to the station, and if you interfere with me I'll shoot you!"

CHAPTER VI.

FOOTPRINTS AND FEARS.

I had barely spoken, when I felt something press and brush against my leg. I glanced down involuntarily to see what it was, and at the same instant the revolver was snatched from my hand. I saw Cloots at my feet, and I glanced up again, completely at the detective's mercy. I was mad with anger and with mortification, and I sprang at him to regain my weapon, but he merely slipped to the other side of the table.

"Don't be foolish, Mr. Halliday," said he. "You're too young to try that sort of game. Be easy, and just think a minute ; I don't want to do you any harm, but I do want you to stay here. If I've made a mistake it'll soon be made right, and I'd have thought a young, spirited fellow like you wouldn't mind an adventure. I tell you again, there's an immense deal hangs on your staying here till I come back with proper powers; and you'll lose nothing by it, I promise you."

"I've nothing in the world to do with your crim-

inal cases," I said. I admit I was very angry and very unreasonable. "I was engaged by Sir Ralph Grimston, as I've told you, to act as his secretary; I came here to find him, and find only an uninhabited house, and I see no reason why I should stay another hour."

"But," said he, "Sir Ralph may appear at any moment."

"He may do as he likes," said I, "but he won't find me here."

"I'm sorry," said the detective, "I can't make you see reason. Here's your shooting-iron. Do as you please. Only let me inform you that all the exits from the park are watched by the county police, and they have their orders to arrest, on suspicion, anyone who comes in or goes out without being able to give an account of themselves."

"On suspicion of what?" I again demanded.

"That I'm sorry I'm not at liberty to tell you at present. But you surely see it will be much better for you to wait a little while; I'll be back in a matter of four-and-twenty or thirty hours."

I said nothing; I reflected that after all it might be better to wait a little, and a day more or less could make little difference to my position. I laid my revolver on the table.

"Very well," said I, "I'll stay ; but I'll make no promise to act as detective."

"We'll not quarrel about that," said he, with a smile. "And if you see no one else, you'll see me again before the end of to-morrow."

He took his hat and went, and Cloots jumped on a chair to see him pass the window. I returned to the kitchen to find Betsy gone too. I was again alone with whatever secrets the house contained. As if he guessed I needed company and solace, Cloots again made extreme overtures of friendliness ; he twined himself about my legs, and rubbed his preposterous, fiendish-looking head against me, with loud purr and tail erect. I shivered in the gloom and silence of the house ; so I went to my travelling-bag, which Betsy had left in the hall, took from it my pipe and tobacco, and went forth into the open air to consider my awkward and suspected position, and to estimate that strange house from a reasonable outward point of view. I walked up and down the gravel as far as it extended, accompanied by Cloots. I thought over my interview with Bygrove, and renewed my anger that he had taken me so much for granted as a person he could do as he liked with. Did I look so young, or so rascally, or what? And what could be the criminal

mystery and connections with which I had unwittingly become entangled? I almost resolved to disregard all prudence and my promise to him, and make a dash for freedom. I supposed it would be possible to cut across the park and scale the wall at some unguarded part. Yet if I went away what could I do? Where could I go? I had little or no money, and Sir Ralph was already my debtor for my considerable travelling expenses. I again settled my resolution to wait a day or two at least, by which time Sir Ralph would probably (or perhaps) have returned, and life would resume its proper, common-sense channel.

Settled and cheered a little by this debate with myself, I sat down on a bench at one end of the gravel sweep, with my side-gaze lazily turned upon the house. Cloots seemed loth to cease his walking exercise, but at length he jumped up and sat beside me, and I stroked his preposterous head. I became very drowsy. Though there was no sunshine, and a thick haze pervaded the air, yet the sun made his heat very potently felt. It was, indeed, the first of those phenomenally hot and close days which distinguished the end of that September. I felt the heat pleasant, and with my eyes still on the house, I think I might have dozed for

an instant. I jumped up, however, wide-awake with the certainty of having seen a face at a window of the second floor of the gable. What the countenance was like, or whether it was male or female, I could not say; it went with a flash as soon as I saw it, as if in fear of discovery.

It may be guessed that that gave a new and violent shock to my nerves. Taken in conjunction with what I had heard and seen the night before I could not but come to the conclusion that some person was hiding in the house, at whose mercy I had been in the darkness, and that person not Sir Ralph. I returned into the house, angry that I should be so disturbed, and resolved to search high and low.

With my revolver in my hand and circumspection in my eye, I began my exploration of the house. It is unnecessary to describe all I saw. From the cellars to the roof—or, at least, to as near the roof as I could get, for at the extreme top of the stairs I came upon a trap-door admitting to a loft or lofts—I entered and looked round every room—every room but one on the first floor, which was securely locked, and *chained on the outside*, considering which last significant fact and that I had no right to break the door open, I let it

alone. All were richly furnished with old furniture and fabrics, all were untidy, and most were thickly powdered with dust; all were gloomy, and some were so closely shuttered as to be almost dark. The only rooms in regular use seemed to be those on the ground floor which I had first seen, and two other rooms at the back, which I judged to be the study and the bedroom of Sir Ralph. Two things struck me as very singular when I had finished my exploration: every door stood open (except the one I have mentioned on the first floor), and nowhere could I discover signs of the ardent pursuit of entomology save in the study, where were two small glass cases of very common butterflies and moths, and a little cabinet case of fine Brazilian beetles. A third thing I discovered was, I think, distinctly the most disturbing I had yet seen: though I saw no human creature I perceived traces of one: on the bare dusty floor of a second-floor room I could see, between me and the door, *the plain impress of stockinged feet*. The footmarks were too large to be those of an ordinary woman (they, therefore, could not be Betsy's), and there were two sets of them: the one turned toward the window in a direct line from the door, and the other from the window to the door, at

wider intervals and with the toe more marked, speaking plainly. I thought of a hasty retreat. Other floors were dusty, but on no other did I see such marks. Where was the being who had made those marks? and who was he?

I returned to the kitchen—the most “comfortable” room in the dreadful house, as Betsy declared—and locked myself in, again to consider my position. I tried to harden my heart and steel my resolution. It was womanish and absurd, I told myself, to be afraid of what I had seen and heard; at the same time it seemed also absurd and preposterous that I, a complete stranger to the house and all that pertained to it, should get myself involved in whatever mystery of life or of death was silently getting itself worked out around me. Had I only been able to make even a good guess against what or whom I had to contend, I think I could have shown a tolerable courage; but when I knew nothing, and could guess nothing, I think I need not be ashamed to say I “funked” the situation. I tramped up and down the kitchen, turning the matter over (Cloots all the while watching me from a chair with half-closed eyes, and purring to himself softly and mysteriously); I sat down to consider the matter seriously, and got up again and

smoked several pipes to think of it calmly. But the more I considered it the less I liked it, and yet I saw nothing I could do; I could only possess my soul in patience, and wait and be watchful.

I had risen to take another turn out of doors when the latch of the door was gently turned and then the rap of knuckles sounded on the panel. It shows the taking my nerves were in, that I let an instant or two pass before I replied.

"Who's there?" I at length sternly demanded.

"Me, Mr. 'Alltheday—Betsy," came in answer to my intense relief.

I opened the door at once and received Betsy with arms almost literally open.

"Sir Rafe bain't come?" she inquired in a whisper. I shook my head. "Your big porkmanky ha' come: Joe brought it. How is't to be got up?"

"I don't know," said I. "If you don't mind, Betsy, I'll leave it in your charge for the present. The fact is, I've been thinking of going away: I don't like this at all."

"Goin' away!" she exclaimed in sharp reproach. "Why, you ha' nobbut come! Sir Rafe 'll be 'ome soon enough: he allus do come back, tho' sometimes I wish he wouldn'." I suppose I looked unresponsive, for she continued, "Ye'u mustn' go,

an' me took to you as I 'ave. It bain't oftens—no, not ever—that I tak' to a body as I ha' took to you."

I am free to confess that Betsy's spontaneous friendliness influenced me at that juncture not a little, and I admitted, "Well, Betsy, I'm not going yet, at any rate. I promise you I'll wait a day or two."

"That's th' ticket," said she. "Now, you mun be 'ungry, a growin' young gentleman like you; I'll mak' you some dinner. What 'u'd you like? Chops again, or some nice eggs and bacon?" I preferred chops, but hoped she would sit down with me again and would cook what she liked. "Thank you, Mr. 'Alltheday," said she, "and I'll sit down wi' you to please you."

"You don't ask me, though," I said, "who it was that rang the bell and had a talk with me."

"No, Mr. 'Alltheday," said she, "I don't. It 'u'd be more than I'm wo'th to be inquisitive, and don't you temp' me—don't, I say. And now you'd better look round a bit whiles I'm at my cookin'."

I declared my intention of helping her, which seemed to give her as much amusement as delight. So we cooked our mid-day meal, and ate it quite merrily to the accompaniment of draughts of the

strong Grimston ale, Cloots again sitting in deep attention between us. When our meal was over and Betsy gone, to keep my mind off the strangeness of my situation I went (still accompanied by Cloots) into the great gloomy dining-room (which I had discovered to be half library) and sought a book to read. I looked for a novel: nothing else would suit me then. There did not seem many examples of that kind of literature. I found a well-thumbed copy of "Uncle Silas," which, under the circumstances, I let alone; a copy of "Martin Chuzzlewit," which suited me then just as ill, and a copy of "Rhoda Fleming," which I took down. I had not then read that greatest of all George Meredith's stories, and I carried it with me from the gloomy room. Even then I did not read much of it, for on looking within the cover I read the name of *Cicely Grimston* written in a fine, firm hand, and that brought me back to speculation about the family with whose affairs I had become embroiled. I went then into the drawing-room to look at the photograph which I had found tossed into a corner, and which Betsy had told me was the likeness of Sir Ralph's daughter. I considered the handsome, strong, proud face, and I thought that probably what Betsy called "hatred" (the feeling which, she

declared, Sir Ralph had for his daughter) was only the friction of the meeting of two similarly strong natures; for by comparison of the photograph with the bronze bust in the hall it was plain that Cicely Grimston was as like Sir Ralph as woman can be like man.

Thus, wondering about the Grimstons, reading and smoking, wandering out and in, and again considering the photograph, I spent that long, warm afternoon. Before dusk Betsy returned to see if I wanted anything and to make the final dispositions about my sleeping arrangement. I absolutely refused to occupy the bedroom she suggested should be mine. I preferred to pass that night at least on the kitchen settle with my travelling rug about me. So, having got from the cellar some more food to cook when I was so disposed, she went her way again, and I was alone till next morning.

Again wandering into the study, I listlessly took from a shelf a nicely bound copy of "The Peerage and Baronetage." It was interleaved, and almost all the interleaves bore comments on the opposite names and titles, written, I guessed, in Sir Ralph's hand. The remarks, even if I could remember them, would scarcely bear to be quoted. They all showed a curious and intimate acquaintance with

the origin and history of eminent families; they were all of a cynical, if not disreputable, turn; they were often gross, and sometimes obscure. But what fixed my attention most was the discovery, on turning to *Grimston*, that he had not spared his own family. It was doleful reading. He made allusions, which I, of course, did not understand, to this, that, and the other Grimston, and he concluded with this remarkable sentence: "The Grimstons have been since the beginning a violent, unfortunate house of Ishmael, and will be till the end. They have ever had the wind and the rain in their faces, and have been pursued by a malignant and furious fate!"

I put away the book. And the darkness—thick, dank darkness—gradually descended, and I became more and more restive. I locked and bolted the great hall door and then withdrew finally to the kitchen. I lit two candles and locked myself in, and presently—more, I believe, to be doing something than because I was hungry—I turned to and cooked my supper. Supper disposed of, I tried again to read, but what with the heat of the fire and the potency of the Grimston ale I fell asleep. I was waked by the horrible hideous bell uttering one deep, funereal "clang." I sat up with throbbing

head and thumping heart. My candles had guttered themselves away and the fire was almost out, so that gaunt and grim shadows pervaded the great kitchen. I shivered, and the hideous bell again uttered a single jarring "clang," and one of my candles went out. I pulled myself together, found another candle and thrust it into the hot socket, took my revolver in my hand, and unfastened the kitchen door. Then I bethought me that if anyone intended violence I was ill prepared, for the candle could easily be knocked from my hand and so my revolver made useless. I put it in my pocket: a thrusting or striking weapon was necessary. I remembered I had seen a cavalry sabre hanging in the hall. I took it down (with a half-alarmed glance at the bust of Sir Ralph, who seemed to be disdainfully watching me), I drew it from its scabbard, and, candle in hand, set myself to open the door.

CHAPTER VII.

A STRANGE ARRIVAL.

When I opened the door, holding the candle carefully aloft and a little behind me, a gentleman (it is the only possible classification of the person) stepped briskly in, as if he had just walked out of Bond Street.

"You are armed," said he, in a fine sonorous voice, with a genteel smile and a turn of the eyebrow toward the formidable sword I carried. He looked round, perceived the mat, and proceeded leisurely to rub his boots, taking off his gloves the while.

I could then take in his points with some completeness. He was rather taller than I—that is, he was nearer six foot than five foot something—he was dark, he had a fleshy hawk nose which threatened strongly over his heavy black mustache, and he was short-sighted enough to wear an eyeglass. When his hat was off, he showed a remarkable mass of black hair tossed carelessly off his fore-

head ; and what with that and his hawk beak, he looked most distinguished and resolute. The one thing that detracted from his distinction of look was the thinness of his long throat, in which the Adam's apple was very prominent. He was dressed with extreme correctness—like an agricultural lord, that is to say, up in town for a show of dogs or horses. He wore a brown round hat, a brown "covert-coat," light and short, and a rough tweed suit, whose trousers showed no such hints of bagginess at the knees as is common with the best-dressed sedentary folk, and were turned up at the bottom as much to show a stout and handsome pair of boots as to be clear of the mire of dirty roads.

I was wroth with him for making me appear to myself to cut a ridiculous figure. And yet he might be the son of the house returned home, and have a thousand times more right there than I ; at the same time he might be anybody, and, in spite of his self-assurance, have even less right there than I. I tried him with a question, while remembering Sir Ralph's caution not to be too inquisitive.

"Have you come to see Sir Ralph ?" I asked.

He made no immediate answer. He carefully hung his hat and his overcoat on a stag's antlers, and then turned toward me as by an after-thought

and drawled "Ye-es," with a grim smile, as if he found my question oddly humorous.

"He is not at home," said I, somewhat nettled.

"Is he not?" said he, carelessly, looking down at his boots. "Ah, well, I suppose we can manage without him. In here?" he inquired, walking toward the light from the kitchen. "By Jove, sir, I admire your choice of this for an eating and smoking apartment; I think the kitchen always the finest room in the house."

I bowed.

"You cook for yourself, I suppose, according to the custom of the house?"

"A little," said I.

"Now," said he, pulling up his sleeves, "I'll show you something which I bet you can't cook; and if you don't say it is the most precious dish you ever tasted—considering its quick production—may I be shot!"

"Thank you," said I, "I ate my dinner just an hour or two ago."

"Ah, then, you can eat a morsel of supper, and I—if you will excuse me—I really must have a meal."

He proceeded to rake together the fire, he let down the top bar of the grate, like one used to it,

and then he found and put on several chunks of wood.

"That will give us," said he, "a fine fire of red-hot embers presently," and he turned to find a frying-pan. "God damn the devil!" he exclaimed. "I must scour this pan, or it will spoil my work."

He set himself to scrub it with salt and thereafter to rinse it, while I stood silently looking on.

"How's Miss Cicely?" he asked, suddenly, but in a completely careless tone.

"Really," said I, "I don't know, though I dare say she is much as usual."

I am not sure that in saying that I did not blush, for I had been speculating about the original of the photograph all the afternoon. But after I had made my answer I glanced at him, and found that, his eyeglass dropped, he was considering me with a look that was curiously side-long and embarrassed. It then occurred to me for the first time that he must be as much puzzled about my identity as I was about his. After that it became a duel for each to discover who the other was. I believed I had already the advantage of him, since it seemed to me that he could not be Sir Ralph's son, or he would not have spoken of

his sister as "*Miss Cicely*," and that he might be taking me for that person—though how that could be I did not well see if Betsy's belief was well-founded that young Ralph was in India.

"I suppose," said he, "there is a ham on cut?"

"'Pon my word," said I, "I don't know."

"Not know? Ah, you want me to show you where the best things are kept. D'you mind coming with me?"

"Certainly not," said I.

He found and sharpened a carving knife, and declared himself ready. Besides the knife he carried a basin and a plate, and I carried a candle. He led the way to the great cellar where I had been with Betsy in the morning, and as the heavy door swung to behind us I felt instinctively for the revolver in my pocket: I could not tell what might be the purpose of the mysterious stranger. He passed across the cellar, and opening a door, disclosed a pantry, on one of the shelves of which was a large cooked ham "on cut."

"What did I tell you?" said he, laying the slightest finger-point of emphasis on my arm.

"You were right," said I.

He cut two or three very thin slices of the ham with such adroitness that I could not but say,

"You could not have cut them finer if you had been bred to the business."

"There are few things," said he, quietly, "I have not learned to do, and I have no vanity about what it's proper to do."

I distinctly felt I had not scored, and I held my tongue.

With the slices of ham on the plate and half a dozen eggs in the basin we left the cellar, and I was turning with the candle toward the kitchen, when he said, "Not yet; we must visit the wine-cellar."

"Wine-cellar?" I said, in some surprise.

"Do you mean to say," said he, "that you have not discovered the wine-cellar yet? One of the best in the country: nothing less than thirty years old."

"Indeed!" said I, with something like indifference.

He turned a full look on me, and I then felt he made up his mind I was nobody in particular. The key, oddly enough, was in the cellar door. We entered.

"What's your tippie?" he asked, glancing down the rows of bins, which to my unaccustomed eyes seemed to extend into the dim distance.

I hesitated, for I remembered Sir Ralph had written to me only of drinking ale. At length, however, I answered, "Port," thinking that that wine was the least likely in a modern cellar to be jealously guarded as "choice."

"Not a bad preference," said he, with something of a new air of patronage; "for, as it happens, this port, for instance"—taking with a level carefulness a bottle from a bin—"is the finest product of soil and sun, and of time maturing both. But, really, for this, you know, we must prepare the palate by something else, something rough. Here's a good honest claret. Do you mind carrying it? I fear my hands are full."

So I with the candle and the claret, and he with the port and the provender, returned to the kitchen.

"Now," said he, "we must decant this port at once. I suppose there's no decanter in the kitchen. I'll get one from the dining-room."

He took a candle and went. He had opened the kitchen door, when he stopped short, with a sharp cry—"My God!" I was by his side in a moment, just as he dropped the candle—*on purpose, I thought*. The suspicion at once leaped into my mind that he must have seen someone—someone

whose presence he did not guess, and of whose presence he wished me to be unaware.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I am unfortunate enough," said he, "to have a heart that sometimes gives me a pang like the thrust of a knife. Perhaps," he added, again completely suave and self-possessed, "you don't know what the thrust of a knife is like."

"Fortunately," said I, "I have never tempted assassination."

"Nor attempted it, eh?" said he. "What about the big sword you met me with?" And he laughed loud and long—a laugh which, I thought, showed a very superficial sense of humor. "But I must get the decanter. Oh, don't you trouble to come," he said, when he saw I was accompanying him. But, for all that, I went.

I saw nothing, however.

Returned to the kitchen, he set me to decant the port, while he shredded down the ham with a rapid dexterity which I could not but admire. Then he broke the eggs into a large basin and proceeded to beat them up with a large fork.

"I am going to make," said he, "what is called in the vulgar tongue a ham omelette. Can you make an omelette? No? Every man should be

able to make an omelette as readily as he makes love. Beat your eggs well and freely, but not so long that the toughness is gone out of them and that all the albumen is quite mixed with the yolk. Have plenty of butter melted in your pan, as you see; then pour in your eggs and stir with your fork till they solidify, and while there is still wanting an instant of its being done, sprinkle in your shredded ham—so; then fold it over with your slice, and slip it from the pan to your dish, and there you are.”

So we sat down at table together, two anonymities. In spite, however, of our guarded regard of each other the meal was sociable. The food was excellent and so was the drink, and the talk did not flag, on one side at least. I, on my part, as the claret sank in my glass and at length gave place to the rare port, became more and more impressed with the appearance of my nameless *vis-à-vis*. At one time he seemed absolutely the most distinguished and commanding person I had ever seen—a truly eagle head and crest; at another the head appeared to withdraw a long way from me and become grotesque: the fell of hair became disordered, the nose lengthened, and the throat till, when he raised his glass to drink and I saw the

movement of the Adam's apple, I could think only of a Spanish fowl stripped of its neck-feathers. The incongruity of the two imaginations made me well-nigh laugh outright now and then, and did much to sustain a constant sense of amusement.

I must sorrowfully admit that I now believe I drank too much, and that at my companion's instigation. I think, however, he did not learn so much from me as he must have hoped. He asked me, for instance, when we began to taste the port, if I had ever seen wine made. I said I had. Where? In France? Germany? I answered, in the Peninsula.

"In the Peninsula!" exclaimed he. "In Portugal?"

"No," said I; "in Spain."

"Ah, so you've travelled, Mr. —er—er——"

"Yes," said I, "Mr. —er, I've travelled a little."

"Ever been in Holland?" he asked. "In Rotterdam, for instance?" and he astonished me with a very obvious and heavy wink.

"No," said I; "I've never been in Holland."

"Then," said he, "believe me, your education has been neglected. Holland is a country to go to."

"And to swim in," said I; upon which he

laughed his peculiarly boisterous and hard laugh; his laugh was, indeed, the only sign I could discover in him of stupidity—of absence of proper humor.

The one other point in our talk that I remember was his asking me suddenly, when I was pretty well overcome with the port, whether there was anyone else in the house, to which I thought it best to answer, "Not that I know of."

When it was quite time to go to bed he suggested that I should seek my room, while he would put himself up in the kitchen.

"As it happens," said I, "I had arranged to sleep in the kitchen, too. I was going to put myself by on that settle, but I shall gladly give it up to a guest."

I thought he seemed a little put out by that. He looked at me, and chewed the end of his mustache; and I was all the more resolved to maintain my point.

"H'm! ha!" said he. "Well, let us see what can be done. I wouldn't think, though, of depriving you of your settle. I'm used to roughing it. I've passed the night in all sorts of insufficient accommodation, even on a bedroom chair with no bottom. So you have your settle."

I protested that I would not.

"God! the devil, sir!" said he. "I beg to insist;" and I could say no more. "Besides," added he, "the settle's too near the fire for me. I'll borrow one of your pillows, though, and make my bed on the table."

I went to lock the door.

"What are you doing?" asked he.

"Locking the door," I answered. "It's always safest, even in the country."

"Ah, yes," said he, and administered a quick look of inquiry.

So we put ourselves by, ceased talking, and let the candles burn themselves out. Having slept an hour or two earlier in the evening I had no inclination to sleep then; and I began to turn over and ponder the manner and speech of my mysterious companion. Who could he be? Of what grade in life? What pursuit? Clearly an adventurous person, if not an adventurer. His regular, deep breathing seemed to signify he was asleep, and I raised myself on my elbow to look at him. The glow of the fire lit up his face. The muscles were loosened, the hair was disordered, and he looked more the black Spanish fowl than ever. Then there came on me a wave of recognition, which

ebbed, however, before it touched me. Where had I seen the man—where?

Just then the awful bell uttered a single deep “clang!” which set my heart thumping again with wonder and alarm. Before I could do more than think whether I should answer the summons, my companion was on his feet and softly unlocking the door. I lay still and listened. I heard the bolts of the great hall door undone, heard voices in low, quick parley for a moment or two, heard the door reclosed and rebolted, and presently saw my companion’s figure (with a candle) in the kitchen doorway turn to look up the stairs.

Then—then I remembered where I had seen such a tall, dark man! *Gracious mercy! in my vision from the train!*

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE NEWS.

The tall, dark man came softly toward me. I felt for the revolver still in my pocket, but made believe as much as possible that I was asleep. He looked at me a moment and then withdrew. He lay down again with a long yawn, and soon I was convinced he was asleep.

But I could not go to sleep. My turmoil of feeling may be guessed. There was I, a fledgling undergraduate, whose chief fears had hitherto been of proctors and ploughings, whose first real anxiety had been caused by the death of my father—there was I not only plunged in an anxious fog of mystery, but hobnobbing, and sleeping cheek by jowl almost with a man whom I believed to be a murderer. I was the more impressed by his being there, and the formidableness of his character, because I could not understand how he had passed the detective's guards at the gates, nor who the person might be who had just come to the door

and been dismissed. But the strong nerves of youth have a quick recuperative power, and being convinced that my terrible companion was asleep, I by and by slept too.

I was waked by the voice of Betsy.

"Now, Mr. 'Alltheday, I'm sorry ; but there, 'ow can I 'elp but wake you up?"

I started to my elbow and looked round. It was broad daylight. I saw no sign of my night's companion, and the table bore no evidence of having been slept on. Could I have dreamed all that happened after my going to sleep when I had eaten my supper? I was speedily undeceived by Betsy.

"Ain't you bin henjoyin' of yoursen last night, Mr. 'Alltheday? Chops, an' pancakes or summat, an' bottles o' wine! 'Pon my david! But I doan' blame you. Nought like a-henjoyin' of yoursen when you're young, afore your teeth goes bad and your stomach weak."

"Where's the—the man?" I asked. "Haven't you seen him?"

"Now, Mr. 'Alltheday! 'Pon my david! there you are again! Now, don't you do it! Don't do it, I say! Allus seein' a man! I won't 'ave it! You're that aggravatin', I'm sure I don't know what for I took to you!"

I reflected that if Betsy had not seen him I had better keep my counsel.

"Never mind, Betsy," I said. "I suppose I must have been dreaming."

"Dreamin'!" said she; "I should think so; it's nobbut nightmare wi' a full stomach!"

While Betsy got through her usual work I went out to get a wash and to smell the morning air, though the day had opened again with a dull sky and a thick, hot atmosphere. I was relieved that the stranger had disappeared, and I started off to stretch my legs among the trees. Cloots, whom I had not seen since the stranger's arrival, turned up from somewhere at hand and galloped along with me, now in front, and now twining through the brushwood in true feline fashion. I kept for some distance to a track that led in the direction of the hill which I had remarked on my arrival at the Ashdown station. Presently I descried vaguely through the trees the square gray tower of a church. Being in no mood for graveyard musings I turned back. Cloots clearly disapproved of my return. He had been trotting before me with tail erect, and when I called him he mewed and twisted and squirmed himself against a tree, but refused to approach. So I walked back to the house alone.

As soon as I re-entered the hall and met the high, disdainful look of Sir Ralph's bronze bust, the mystery of the house enveloped me again, and its troubles invaded me anew. On the hall table, immediately behind that very bronze bust, among some correspondence addressed to Sir Ralph, I found a telegram addressed to myself. On tearing it open I read as follows :

"Deceased identified. You free. If anything with you wire Scotland."

The message was, of course, from Bygrove. It declared that I was free to go, though now that I knew that, I was less eager to avail myself of my freedom ; and it gave a fresh interest to the mystery of the Camberwell tavern, though I could not feel the identification so keenly as if I had known the man who had gripped Sir Ralph Grimston's signature in his dead hand, and it made me fervently thankful that the murdering stranger was gone. The wonder, however, was why he had come. The thankfulness did not last long, but the wonder remained.

I had asked Betsy when the telegram came, and she had answered that it had come the night before, and she had forgotten to point it out when she had waked me. I had eaten my breakfast again in

her company, though I fear I was poor company for her, and with the thought of perhaps wiring to the detective, and so putting to the test my freedom to move beyond the park bounds, I had asked, and had been told, the way to Wintop railway station.

"Straight across," said she, "th' way I saw you go this mornin', through the turnstile, past th' church into th' lane, and on a bit to th' right-hand."

Betsy was gone again. I had reread the telegram, crumpled it up and thrown it in the fire, and I was then standing by the kitchen window debating with myself anew, when a familiar, sonorous voice sounded in my ear. I turned, and to my amazement and alarm, saw the mysterious stranger in the same guise as I had seen him the evening before.

"Good-morning," said he, cheerfully. "I hope you haven't breakfasted?"

"I have," said I; "and I was just going out."

"Really," said he. "You won't keep me company, then, in eating a morsel?"

"Thanks, no," said I.

I left him at once, and went forth filling and lighting my pipe, resolving to telegraph at once to

the detective. I did not ask myself whether it was a fair, straightforward move: I only felt I must get rid of the distinguished dark man, who had descended on me like a nightmare, and who, I believed, was the person sought for in connection with the Camberwell murder. And this was the form I settled my telegram should take:

"Bygrove, Scotland Yard—

"Sir R. not back. Tall, dark man here. Come."

I strode quickly along the track I had already trod. I was glad to be in among the trees, for it was as hot and close as if it were an August day. At about the point where he had forsaken me when I took my morning stroll, Cloots rejoined me, and accompanied me as far as the churchyard. There he disappeared under the shade of a great, black yew-tree, just as I was accosted by a constable, who suddenly appeared from somewhere about the church and demanded my name. I told him my name and explained my errand.

"All right, sir," said he. "We've been instructed to let you pass any way."

And so I went on my way wondering. I turned into the lane, and to the right, as Betsy had di-

rected me, and soon found the little Wintop station. To my extreme disappointment, I found I could not telegraph from that station; I must go to Marly Junction, four miles up the line, and I must walk there, or wait for an hour and a half for a train to take me. I preferred to walk. I accomplished the distance in something less than an hour, and therefore walked into the station in a rather hot and sodden condition. I found the telegraph office, and was making for the little window labelled "Telegraph," when I saw approaching me the tall, dark man himself, looking cool and contemplative, an exasperating contrast, I felt, to my heat and flurry.

"Ah!" said he, shaking a finger at me in greeting. "You've come, like me, I suppose, for the morning paper? Why didn't you tell me you were coming. We might have walked over together."

"I thought you were sitting down to breakfast," said I, scarce knowing what to say, while I, damp and dusty, looked in vain for similar signs in him of having performed a six-mile walk.

"I never spend more than five minutes over breakfast. But," said he, taking my unwilling arm, "come and get your paper, and let us have a cool-

ing drink. How have you got so hot? You've taken your time on the walk?"

"I went to Wintop first," I said.

"Oh!" said he. "Expected to find papers there? Ah, no; no papers there."

I wondered if he guessed what I had really come for, I wondered why the few railway officials about saluted him with so much respect, and most of all, I wondered why I let him take possession of me, and hinder my purpose. I asked for *The Standard* at the bookstall, and then when he showed me he had *The Standard*, I took, at his suggestion, *The Daily Telegraph* instead. I drank with him, and at his request I left the station with him, without sending my telegram.

"We may as well walk back together," said he. "I can show you a shorter way than you came."

I accompanied him, feeling a little ashamed, and very much put out. He led me by cross-paths which I, of course, knew nothing of, over fields and through plantations, until we came to a boundary wall about his own height. He swung himself to the top by means of an overhanging bough, and I followed him, and descending on the other side, suspected we were in the Grimston private

domain. So, I guessed, he must have entered the night before, unseen by any constable on the watch.

"Now," said he, unfolding and flapping out his newspaper, while I did the same, "let us see where we are, what's doing, and how the world wags. I always find when I have withdrawn from the centre of things for a little—I mean, of course, from London—that something of importance is sure to happen. Now."

Very quickly—with, indeed, surprising quickness and unanimity—we found something, and looked in each other's face at the same instant. It was clear we had both sought the same topic—the Camberwell murder, to wit.

"That's a most extraordinary thing," said he; "I'll wager you've made the same discovery—that the dead man in that Camberwell affair held a scrap of paper tight in his hand with Sir Ralph Grimston's signature."

"I knew that before," I said at once, without thinking; and then I could have bitten my tongue out for having said it.

"You did!" he exclaimed, with the slightest perceptible lifting of an eyebrow.

"It was in yesterday's paper," I declared, for-

getting for the moment that I had not seen yesterday's news.

He folded his paper and put it in his pocket.

"Now, Mr. Halliday," said he—while I started on hearing him pronounce my name—"I should like to have a quiet word with you, just as one man with another, without any of the fencing we've had."

"Nothing would please me better," said I; "only first tell me, as a point of curiosity, how you have learned my name."

He answered by showing me the telegram I had received from Bygrove, which I had crumpled up and thrown away.

"When you mean to burn a paper," said he, "you should see that it burns, and not be careless whether it goes under the grate. And now that I have got your name, let me give you mine—Townshend—you may have heard it." I shook my head. "I believe, Mr. Halliday, I know your father," continued Townshend, with a profound air of recollection.

"He is dead," said I.

"Is he dead?—at his post in Barcelona, I suppose?"

"Valencia," I corrected.

"Valencia, I mean," said he. "I once knew your father very well; a most remarkable man, a gentleman and a scholar. I admired him very much. And now I hope his son will excuse the liberty I am going to take for his sake. I don't want to meddle—I am not a meddler, I never was—but I would quarrel with my conscience if it tried to prevent me from telling you the truth about this unfortunate house you have entered. The Grimstons have been all mad, as you can hear from any one in the country round. Here's old Sir Ralph, for instance—as the papers of to-day and yesterday declare—somehow concerned in a public-house brawl that ends in murder." I looked firmly at him, but he returned my gaze without the quiver of an eyelid and with the friendliest expression of countenance, so that my suspicion of him began to yield and melt. "Is not that how it strikes you?" said he. "He's always been so—mad, mad as a hatter—so that he disappears like this—the devil knows where—for days, weeks, or months at a time, just as the humor takes him. My position here is an embarrassing one, for—I don't mind telling you in confidence—I have long been an intimate member of the family."

It was unfortunate for him that he said that; I

became at once furiously jealous; for what could I interpret him to mean but that he either was a member of the family, or that he was likely to become one—that is to say, that he was engaged to be married to the original of the photograph with which I was already in love. He smoothed my furious suspicion down, however, for the time by a frank confession.

“My mother,” said he “was Sir Ralph’s first wife.”

“Oh, indeed!” said I, considerably interested and appeased. “I’ve heard that Sir Ralph has been twice married.”

“What a deuce of a deal you know,” said he, with a smile; “and you came here only yesterday.”

“The day before,” said I.

“The day before, was it?” asked he.

“To be precise,” said I—“the evening before.”

“Well, I don’t know—I don’t seek to know,” he continued, “the conditions on which, or the capacity in which, you came.”

“No, no,” I assented, “of course not.”

“It’s no business of mine. But I tell you solemnly, Mr. Halliday”—and his fine, sonorous voice thrilled me with conviction—“that you’ll rue the day you ever entered the house if you stay in

it longer. You cannot stay in it long in any case, for when Sir Ralph is back you will find it absolutely unbearable. Sir Ralph, of course, may now be heard of at any moment, to clear his name; but my advice, as a friend of your father, is, to leave this place before he returns. If I were you I'd go at once. I'm going up to town, and we might go together; and—you'll excuse my mentioning it—if want of coin would be any bar I have fifty pounds I can put at your service."

"I am obliged to you," said L. "But even if the house were Bedlam, I don't see why I should run away from it."

"The house is not Bedlam," said he, with his impressive sonority; "it's something very much less, and very much worse, than Bedlam. I cannot be more explicit. Out of pure friendliness I have said more already than I ought to have said."

To be sure, I thought, it *was* friendliness. It was only prepossession and suspicion (and I might be grievously mistaken) that had kept me from recognizing from the first his friendliness and good-fellowship. I felt I had been ungenerous, and yet——

"Let me think it over a little," I said.

"As you please," said he. "But remember the last train to town is from Marly Junction at 5.30."

3.29.19A

CHAPTER IX.

THE COMING OF CICELY.

I thought that before coming to a conclusion I would try to disembarass my mind of my prepossession either one way or the other regarding Townshend. To that end I sat down alone on one of the benches before the house and opened my newspaper again. Again I turned, almost unconsciously, to the account of the Camberwell mystery, which I had not finished reading. I soon became interested in what I read. There had clearly been a previous account (of the day before, probably), which had given particulars of the identification of the murdered man as a person known to the police as a superior sort of burglar, or "swell cracksman" (then Bygrove, I thought, must have known who he was), and which had mentioned the fact that the room where the murder had been committed had been hired by a "fair, rosy, farmer-looking person," known to the landlord as a betting man, and a consummately thirsty

drinker. In the account before me that person's name was given as "William Hine," and it was declared that "the authorities" had a clew which was expected to lead to his discovery and that of other persons supposed to be concerned. There was speculation on the writer's part as to what "Ralph Grimston" had to do with it, but I saw, to my surprise, that no one had yet guessed that the signature was that of Sir Ralph Grimston.

I laid my paper aside and considered the curious and suggestive points that arose in my mind in a sudden crop. Clearly Bygrove had kept his own counsel—his connection of Sir Ralph with the Camberwell affair—and evidently he was "the authorities" who held "a clew" to the discovery of Hine and "other persons supposed to be concerned." Was Sir Ralph one of the "other persons?" And was Townshend—or, at least, the tall, dark man I had seen from the train—another? I could not believe it. If he knew he was liable to arrest, would he be, as he was, nonchalantly hanging about The Wytches? And, though somewhat sinister, he looked completely a gentleman, as little of a "swell cracksman" as of a murderer. I could not but think that his being a tall, dark man, closely resembling the one I had seen from the

train, was but a coincidence—a coincidence which I ought not to cherish morbidly. And yet (the point flashed upon me), why had he at once assumed that the “Ralph Grimston” of the scrap of paper was Sir Ralph, if he knew nothing of the business? The newspaper writer did not hint it. I was terribly perplexed how to regard him, or what to say to him.

I was meditating on that, and again seeing (in my mind’s eye) the tall, dark man strike the fatal blow, when a hand was laid on my shoulder and I started to my feet. It was Townshend. He pressed me back in my seat and sat down beside me, with a smile.

“Your nerves are on the twitter,” said he, “and this is a place to put them on the twitter. Look at all this,” indicating with a comprehensive sweep of his arm the desolate, blind-eyed house, and the flat, dreary, and tangled grounds; “you jar a nerve with every wink of your eye. And talking of winking your eye, I suppose you slept very little last night and the night before; that also would set your nerves on the twitter, particularly in this house.”

“No,” said I, “I did not sleep well either last night or the night before. I have not slept prop-

erly for a week," I continued, summarizing the grievance as much to myself as to him. "Two bad nights here, one indifferent night in a London hotel—troubled with dreams of a horrible thing I saw just as my journey was ending—and two bad nights on my way from Valencia; I suppose all that does shake me."

"No doubt it does," said he. "I hope," he continued, turning with a sudden frankness, "I did not disturb you last night. I thought I heard a pull at the bell and I got up, but I fancied you were asleep. I went to the door, but there was no one."

"No one?" I exclaimed.

"No one at all," he answered.

I shivered. Could it be that I had been mistaken in thinking that I heard voices? or was he trying to deceive me? I looked sharply at him, but the look he gave me in return was that of direct sincerity and frankness.

"Then," said I, without considering the possible effect of what I said, "the bell rang without the touch of a human hand."

"You heard it?" asked he.

"Yes," I answered, "I heard it."

"Well," said he, with a laugh so amazingly bass

and inharmonious that I can compare it to nothing but the blast of a fog-horn at sea, "that's but one of the queer things about the house. The clang of a bell unpulled by human hand, the sound of a ghostly footstep on the stairs, the vision of a pair of bare feet, and nothing else, running down a corridor, are but the commonplaces of the mystery of the house. The most remarkable thing is the vision of a Grimston of about a hundred years ago, the mad Grimston that burned down the house of his time. They say that he goes his rounds outside the house with a cat like that brute Cloots at his heels. I've been about the place a good many years, but I've never seen him. But he is not always on view; he appears only, they say, when some trouble or disaster has happened, or is going to happen."

The jesting turn he gave to his mention of the periods of the vision only made me feel more inclined to shiver.

"I saw him," I said.

"What!" he exclaimed. "You saw him, too?"

"The night before last—a man in a slouch hat and a cloak."

"That's how he appears," said he. Then, after a pause, "It seems, then, that some disaster is at

hand, which it would be wise of you to avoid being mixed up in. Have you made up your mind yet about going?"

"I have not," I said. "I am very awkwardly placed. If I go away I don't know where to go. I have not a relation, and scarcely a friend, in England; all my people and my father's latest friends are abroad. At the same time, I don't know what there is to stay for, since I have not seen—nor seem likely at present to see—my employer; and yet, when he engaged me to come as his secretary——"

"His secretary?"

"——as his secretary," I replied, "he warned me to be prepared for eccentricities in his conduct."

"Eccentricities!" exclaimed my companion. "Yes, he has eccentricities. But," he said, screwing his glass over his eye and looking away out among the trees, "wouldn't your Scotch friend do something for you?"

"My Scotch friend?" I asked. "Whom do you mean?"

"The person that sent you that telegram to-day," and he gave me a side-look which suggested that he guessed as well as I knew what was the "Scotland" from which the sender of the telegram hailed.

I was, however, saved from attempting an awkward reply by a vision appearing through the trees which Townshend had already fixed his eyeglass on. It was a lady, and she was approaching along that track which Cloots frequented, and which I had got to know as the way to and from the church and Wintop Station.

"Who can this be?" I asked.

"Why," exclaimed he, "it must be—it certainly is—Cicely herself! What is she coming for? God damn the devil! Here's a precious coil! She's carrying a bag or portmanteau or something. Mr. Halliday, it's Miss Grimston. Would you mind going to meet her, while I run indoors and see if the house is at all ready for her?"

He went into the house, and I rose and went to meet the young lady. On approaching her I was filled with confusion and had a mind to turn aside; for she looked at me in astonishment, and besides that her beauty was such as alarms a very young man. She was not quite so tall as from the photograph I had conceived her to be, but yet she was of a fair and proper height, straight and well-built withal. How she was dressed I can scarcely tell, except that she looked "fit" and trim, without any superfluity of ribbons or scarves, and that she wore

on her head the kind of thing which, I believe, is known to ladies as a "toque," adorned with a seagull's wing.

"Let me carry your bag, Miss Grimston," said I.

"Thank you," said she.

Her straight, bright look and her frank manner made me her slave at once, although it was clear she wondered who on earth I was, and how the dickens I knew her name.

"Is my father at home?" she asked.

"No," I answered. "He has not been at home for some days, I believe. At least, I have not seen him, and I came here two days ago. I'm the new secretary; my name is Halliday."

"Oh, you're the new secretary—pleased to know you, Mr. Halliday," said she, again considering me.

"Is there no one else in the house?" she asked.

"There's a—there's Mr. Townshend," answered I.

By that time we had reached the house, and Townshend came out to meet us.

"Oh," said she, looking at him with a smile, but giving him neither hand nor formal bow, "you're here!"

"Yes, Cicely," said he, "I'm here. I've been here since last night."

"And where's my father?" she asked. "You're sure to know, and you must tell me."

The tone and the look were indescribably suggestive that she neither altogether liked the man nor altogether trusted him, and hearing it, and considering the open, defenceless way in which she was entering that den of mystery (which, Betsy had told me, she seldom visited), I resolved I would not go away.

CHAPTER X.

HATLESS AND BOOTLESS.

"Really, Cicely, now," said Townshend, in reply, firmly screwing his glass in his eye and steadily regarding her, "I might say, 'Am I your father's keeper?' But I won't say it."

"You *have* said it," she retorted.

"But Sir Ralph," said he, "so often goes away and comes back in his own good time."

"I have never known him to go away," she continued, "without your knowing where he went."

"But he has been sometimes away without your knowing it, Cicely."

To that she had nothing to say, but presently she resumed, "You must know why I am anxious this time."

"I don't," said he, promptly.

"Do you mean to tell me that you haven't read about that murder in the papers, and haven't guessed that the name in the dead man's hand was my father's?"

"Oh, you've guessed that, have you, Cicely?"

"I went to the police people in Scotland Yard, and saw the bit of paper, and recognized my father's signature."

"What a very energetic young lady you are, Cicely!" was all he said.

She looked as if she would say more; but she repented, and swept past him into the house and upstairs, while I followed, bearing her little portmanteau.

There were two things struck me in that brisk little conversation they had held—that she never addressed him by name, and that he had not given her one straight answer.

"How dreadfully dirty everything is!" she exclaimed, pausing at the open door of a room which, I supposed, it was her wont to occupy when she was at home. Then turning and observing me she said, "Oh, Mr. Halliday, I did not think you were troubling to carry that for me! Thank you very much. And would you mind letting Betsy know—you have seen Betsy, of course—telling her that I'm come and that I want my room made clean and tidy?"

I looked at her and hesitated. It was evident that she intended to take her place in the house,

just as if her father were there to keep her in countenance.

"You think," said she, with a beautiful blush and a smile, "that it is strange of me to take up my quarters here? But I am used to taking care of myself, and Betsy will come and stay with me."

I had nothing to say. Her innocence and courage provoked my admiration, but I resolved I would occupy the room Betsy had prepared for me, so that I might be at hand in case of danger.

On my return from the lodge, after delivering the message to Betsy, I encountered Townshend.

"Well," said he, "Mr. Halliday, have you made up your mind yet about the subject of our conversation?"

"I have," said I.

"And your decision?" he asked.

"Is to remain until I am released from my engagement by Sir Ralph."

"Oh! I presume you have carefully considered the point?"

"I have, and I am fixed."

His only reply was an elaborate gesture, like that of a French fencer when he salutes his opponent—a gesture (he was always free and graceful in action) the significance of which did not then

occur to me. But I felt even then that that was the moment of a new departure. I viewed Townshend now, not merely as probably a murderer, but also as an unwelcome pretender to intimacy with Cicely herself ; and in that latter regard, I am fain to admit—absurd though it must seem—I considered and resented him more than in the other.

And I may here say that, in looking back, the coming of Cicely, besides precipitating certain discoveries and events, had the beneficent effect of “making a man ” of me, to use the vulgar but expressive phrase. I became occupied more with another than with myself, interested more in the dangers and anxieties of another than in my own, and, as a consequence, I became more alert, more resourceful, and more self-reliant. Such is the tonic effect of love on a man.

“Mr. Halliday,” said Townshend, after a few minutes, returning to me where I stood meditating at the open hall-door, “it’s about time we were thinking of lunch. Miss Grimston must be hungry, and I’m sure you will agree with me we ought to try to make her comfortable.”

“Certainly,” said I. “But what can we do?”

“Well,” said he, “you know she has no cook to grill her chop, no maid to lay her cloth. It would

be shameful to let her do these things for herself with her own fair hands while there are active and capable men about. Now, I'll engage to cook her lunch if you will undertake to lay her cloth."

"With pleasure," said L. "Where shall I lay for her?"

"The dining-room," said he, "is too large and gloomy, I think; though I don't suppose it would frighten or depress her. But Sir Ralph's study seems to me best. The centre-table will be large enough for her, and it can easily be cleared; we, as befit us, shall take our meal in the kitchen."

After rummaging I found a clean table-cloth and all the articles necessary to set it forth; I even went out into the neglected garden and gathered a few belated roses and other flowers which the unusual warmth of those days had deluded into bloom. When I had done my part I went into the kitchen and observed, with surprise and something like envy, the skill and quickness of Townshend as cook. He had already fried some mutton cutlets, which were keeping hot in a dish in the oven while he prepared some sauce of a most appetizing savor.

"God damn the devil!" he exclaimed. "I shall never do myself justice in this kitchen! I can't even find a silver dish to serve my cutlets upon."

and that's all I have been able to do by way of a *menu* ! ”

He pointed to a half sheet of note-paper on which he had written, in a strikingly ornate hand :

LUNCHEON, SEPTEMBER —.

Côtelettes de Mouton, Sauce Piquante.

Chops à l'Anglaise.

ENTREMETS.

Omelette aux Confitures.

Omelette aux fines Herbes.

Apple Fritters.

“Would you mind,” said he, “taking that to Miss Grimston, and asking her what she would like to have?”

I found Miss Grimston in the drawing-room, standing by the window with an air of loneliness and sadness, and I hesitated about showing her the paper; she might think we only meant to play a joke upon her. I considered, however, that she probably knew Townshend's ways, and I went to her.

“Lunch is laid for you, Miss Grimston,” said I, “in the study, and——”

“Who laid it?” she demanded, quickly. “Betsy has not come, has she?”

"No," I answered; "I laid it, and Mr. Townshend is cooking it."

"You are very good," she said, with something like apathy.

"And this," I said, "is the list, the *menu*, of the dishes he has to offer you to choose from."

She looked at me with wide eyes of amazement, and then, taking the paper, burst, in spite of her sadness, into such a wholesome peal of laughter as did one good to hear. She at once fell in with the humor of the thing. She asked me what Mr. Townshend had already cooked. I answered "the cutlets;" then she said she would have cutlets. While I returned to the kitchen, she went to the study. Presently she appeared at the kitchen door.

"Excuse my intruding on you," she said, "but I find I cannot sit down alone to lunch, and I wish you gentlemen to join me."

"We are flattered, Miss Grimston," said Townshend, "but really, to sit down with you, straight from the kitchen—well, you know it's not the thing. I beg to be excused."

"And I," said she, taking the matter as seriously as he, "beg to insist. I venture to request Mr. Halliday to lay for two more."

So we sat down together to eat and drink, with Cloots, unconcerned and inscrutable, in the chair opposite his mistress. It was the first time I had seen him in the house since the arrival of Townshend. Townshend was opposite me, with the light on his face, so that better than I had yet done I could observe his varying expression, as the meal went on, and the accompanying conversation. Under his marvellous self-possession I could see that his nerves were at a high pitch of alertness and attention, and I judged that he was carefully playing a careless part, that he was under constant apprehensiveness. Once only, however, did he betray his anxiety, as I shall relate. We had talked for some time of nothing particular—of Townshend's faculty as a cook and what not—when Cicely sprang the subject that was evidently filling her mind.

"Both of you," said she, "have been so kind to me that I wish to ask your advice about my father. *You* say," continued she, looking at Townshend, "that you don't know where he is. The police say they don't know where he is."

"Why should they know?" asked Townshend.
"What have they got to do with it, Cicely?"

"They want to clear him from suspicion of hav-

ing had anything to do with that dreadful man that was killed in the tavern."

"That's nice and gentlemanly in the police," said Townshend. "And I suppose they asked you, Cicely, if you knew where he might be?"

"They did," she answered. "And I said that I did not know where he was if he was not at home, but that I thought you would."

"And I suppose you gave them my name and address?" he asked.

"Of course," replied she.

His eye-glass dropped from his eye, and his face assumed a singular expression of anger, less manifested in his eyes than about his nose, which became curiously pinched and cadaverous. But it passed almost as soon as I observed it.

"Really, Cicely," said he, resuming his eye-glass, "you must permit me to say your simplicity is charming. It would never occur to you that a man might not wish to give his name and address to the first person that asked for it."

"Have I done wrong, then?" she asked, blushing and looking a little alarmed.

"Oh, no," said he, "it's of no consequence."

"But, surely," said she, considering, "you are not afraid of the police?"

"Oh, dear, no," he answered, promptly, "but a gentleman has such things as debts, and the publication of his address might be awkward."

"Then," said Cicely, "I dare say you won't like to see the detective that's coming?"

"Ah," said he, "I thought there was a detective coming. No, that won't disturb me. Do you know the detective's name?"

"Bygrove," she answered.

"Bygrove? It seems to me I've heard the name."

"He's been here already," said I, without thinking whether I ought or ought not to reveal the fact.

The effect of my words was curious. Cicely looked at me in simple surprise, while Townshend turned the light of his eye-glass on me with a gaze which I thought intimated convinced suspicion.

"Really!" was all he said.

"Yes," I stammered, wishing I had held my tongue; "but he was only here about half an hour, talking to me. That was the first morning I was in the house."

"This is getting quite interesting," said he. "And when is he coming back, Cicely?"

"I don't know," she answered, "but soon, I expect."

"Soon, I hope," said he.

And thus the matter dropped—though I had an

impression Cicely looked as if she had more to say—and we rose from the table and went our several ways.

All the afternoon, in that thick September heat, I wandered in and out, considering the mystery in which I was becoming more and more involved, and yet baffled by it, wondering at the way in which the lines of interest were converging to that house, and yet not perceiving the point to which they tended. All the afternoon I saw nothing of Townshend, and I began to think he must have carried out his intention of going to town; and all the afternoon Cicely was shut in her room with Betsy. At length Betsy came out while I stood in front of the house observing the haze creeping and gathering among the trees in silent, ghostly shapes and approaching the house as if to beleaguer it. She waddled swiftly up to me, and then glancing furtively this way and that, said, in a quick, low voice:

“She tells me *he's* here. I didn' know, and 'tain't no business o' mine if I did. But I ha' took to you—as I told Miss Cicely—an' I could never tak' to him. Mind your eye wi' him! He's a hugly, bad man. An' I say, ain't she in a takin' about her father!—as if I could help it. But I

mun go, and come back later on. My sakes! won't Sir Rafe go on if he knows I've been here 'cept o' mornings! But not a word!"

She nodded, with tight-closed mouth, looked sharply about her, and waddled away. I did not try to detain her, for I thought if Townshend were about it might be unwise to be seen in conversation with her. I entered the house, my footsteps in the hall ringing strangely solitary to my strained attention. I began to think, half with pleasure and half with dread, of the likelihood of being alone in the house with Cicely to attend upon and to protect her, when a cry, as of distress, rang on my ears from Sir Ralph's study.

I entered in haste, but there was no one there. At the farther end of the room, however, was an open door, and to that I went. I judged it to be Sir Ralph's bedroom. In the light of a tall, narrow window stood Cicely, with her hands clasped before a dark oak wardrobe set open.

"Look at that!" she exclaimed, when she saw me, in a voice thrilling with horror.

I advanced, dreading what I might see. When I looked within the wardrobe I saw nothing but coats and hats above, and boots and shoes below. I turned on Cicely a puzzled look of inquiry.

"There," said she, pointing to a soft gray felt hat, "that is the hat my father usually goes out in! I know every hat that he wears; he has not had a new hat for years, he would never buy one. I have counted them all over and over again from the time I was a little girl, *and they are all there!* And his boots, too; look—I have reckoned them all! People say he is mad. But is he mad enough to go away without hat or boots?"

She turned to me with horror and grief, and the red western sun, shining through the window, illuminated her face and figure.

"I have feared," said she, "that some dreadful thing had befallen him in London, and have tried to put away the fear. But this is more dreadful than anything I have thought of. He cannot have gone from home of himself bareheaded and barefooted! What can have happened to him? Oh, the poor, dear old man!" she cried, sinking into a chair, and putting her hands to her face. "Poor, solitary father! And there is no one to think of him or regret him but me! No one to see what is become of him but me!"

"Miss Grimston," said I, all trembling with excitement and compassion, "please to command me in whatever you wish to be done."

CHAPTER XL

CAUGHT.

"You are very good," she said, rising and frankly giving me her hand, "and I have no doubt you can help me. And, you see" (this she said with a smile that had a suspicion of tears) "that I need help. My brother is far away, and Mr. Townshend—well, I can't tell you why I can't quite trust him."

"I don't think, Miss Grimston," said I, "that I am very clever at unravelling mysteries; I may be, but I don't know, for I have never tried. But I hope I may be of use."

We left that lugubrious room and sat down in the study, and I related to Cicely all the circumstances of my coming to The Wytches—not omitting my vision from the window of the train—my interview with the detective, and the arrival of Townshend. Why had he come at that particular juncture? Neither Cicely nor I could make a satisfactory guess. One possible reason that hov-

ered in my mind—that he was hoping to escape detection for his share in the Camberwell murder—I could not impart to her. Silence fell between us. Since I was desirous not to embarrass her at all, I went out to relieve my feeling by walking. I closed the hall-door behind me, and tramped away among the trees through the gathering haze and the deepening dusk. I lighted my pipe, and set myself to think all through the matter, and to consider what I could do.

I was thus tramping along when I caught my foot against some soft, living thing that squealed and leaped away. My heart leaped into my mouth with the shock, but, on standing still a moment, I saw in the dusk a small, black shadow approach, and then felt a creature rub itself against my leg, and I guessed it was Cloots. Cloots, I now bethought me, had never shown himself to me indoors since Townshend's arrival, except that day at lunch, when he had sat over against Cicely; I wondered why, and I wondered also why I always met him on that same track on which I then was; and, most of all, I wondered, when I had turned to come back, why he would always go with me, but would not return.

As I thought of Townshend, I felt I could not

associate with him any more; but, as I grew calmer, I perceived there would only be disadvantage in that. It would, I saw, be much more to the purpose to talk, and eat, and drink with him, as I had done until now; to accept him as being what he seemed—an agreeable, polished, and versatile gentleman. I was somewhat surprised, considering that I had thought him gone to town, to encounter him close to the house on my return. He met me with a genial smile and nod, and a little sweep of the hand, as if he meant to smooth away all difficulties of temper and confidence between us.

“I’m sure,” said he, “you will agree with me that we must make Miss Grimston comfortable,” which I interpreted to truly mean, “We must keep her, for some reason or other, in a good temper.”

“Certainly,” said I.

“Well, I think,” said he, “it’s very likely she will not want to leave her room again. What’s your opinion of preparing her a nice tray, and handing it in to her?”

He was, in short, full of ideas for dinner, which we proceeded to carry into execution. Sitting contemplatively by in the kitchen while he cooked, I became interested in the large quantity of food he

was preparing—much too large, it seemed to me—for three persons. I took a tray to Cicely's door, knocked, and left it on her mat. I returned and sat down to eat with Townshend, still with my attention occupied with the quantity of food. We talked, but I observed that, while there was still much unconsumed, he neither invited me to have more, nor had more himself. Why was this notable quantity prepared and left? For whom? I suddenly revived my former lively suspicion that there was someone in hiding about the house. Could it be Sir Ralph? But for what conceivable reason should Sir Ralph hide in his own house? I judged that Townshend, however, would anon carry food to the person who might be in hiding, and I determined to watch. I knew he would make no movement while I remained in the kitchen, so, on the pretence of being very tired, I said I would go to my room. I yawned wearily, said "Good-night," and went; and he did not even pretend he wished me to stay.

I ascended to my room, put on a pair of tennis shoes, listening the while for a footstep on the stairs, and then I left my room, locking the door. I descended swiftly to the hall and waited within the drawing-room. I expected that whoever was

in hiding must be hid somewhere in the upper regions of the house, to which I knew of no approach but the common staircase. I waited for Townshend to appear, and still I waited. My suspicion, or my calculation, was somehow wrong. I stepped noiselessly to the kitchen door. I tried to peep through the key-hole; I listened, but I neither saw nor heard anything. I peeped again, and it struck me that the only light within was from the flickering flame of the fire. I opened the door gently and put my head in; there was no one there. I crossed the floor, remarking on the way that the remains of dinner were gone, and then I saw that the door leading to the cellar stood open.

I went on into the darkness, slowly feeling my way with foot and hand. Then I fancied I was in the midst of a draught of cold air. I pressed on, with my face to the draught, and presently I saw beyond me, at about the height of my head, a square gray patch in the blackness. I pushed on, and came to a flight of ten steps with a small open door at the top. When I passed through the doorway I was in the open air. I was at a loss for a moment, but on looking about I saw a light on my right-hand, well over my head, shining within the

small window of a square kind of a tower abutting from the mansion. Whoever was in hiding I was convinced must be there. I examined the base of the tower and discovered in the angle against the wall a low-browed door (I wondered that I had not remarked it before) with a heavy iron-ringed handle, bespeaking a considerable solidity in the door itself. I turned the handle and pushed the door, which yielded, with a horrible grating and grinding noise. I did not pause, however. I pushed in and saw a narrow, twisting staircase faintly before me. I had barely entered and urged the door back as nearly closed as I dared, when a light appeared above and a voice—Townshend's voice—said, "I'm sure I heard it." I squeezed myself into a recess formed by the staircase, drew my revolver from my pocket, covered my white face and hands as well as I could with my cap and coat, and waited, while the light and its bearer descended. Townshend opened the door and looked out, and then, with a mutter, returned upstairs. The light had but disappeared, and I had just come from my nook, when it reappeared, and I saw two men—Townshend and another—ascend higher up the spiral stairs.

Without thinking of the consequences I slipped

up the first flight and looked into the room they had left. In the centre of the room was a small table, and on it—as I could vaguely see by the light from the window—were the remains of a meal. I had no time either to see more or do anything, when I heard steps and voices approaching; there was no chance of slipping away down the stairs unobserved, and therefore I looked and felt about me for some place of concealment in the room itself. A cold perspiration broke out on me, for the room seemed completely bare and open. At last, and just as their light began to show through the half-open door, I saw there was a curtain against the wall on one side, and I at once whipped behind it.

The two men entered and set the candle on the table, and then, to my horror, I saw, on looking down, that the light shone upon my feet. The curtain was short of the floor by some four or five inches and I might be discovered at any moment.

I felt if there was any way of escape behind me—if there was a door—but I could not make certain. It was woodwork; but I could feel no handle, no protuberance of any kind. I was in a terrible fix—exposed to I knew not what danger from two

desperate men; but I resolved to maintain my self-possession, and to see and learn what I could.

"I didn't mean no harm—yer know I didn't—when I dotted Sir Rafe," said Townshend's companion, as soon as they had sat down. "And I'm sorry. There! I can't say fairer nor that."

"A nice mess you've got us into, William," said Townshend. "You're a hot-headed, hot-handed young man. All Scotland Yard is looking for you on one count, and a little whisper would set them on to look for you on another."

I contrived to part the curtain sufficiently to see the person sitting with Townshend. A big, fair man he was, of the type that is commonly called a "bruiser." "*A fair, rosy, farmer-looking man*;" the description was running in my head, though it was a second or two before I could remember its relation. It was used by the detective in speaking of the man who had hired the room in the Camberwell tavern, and it was used again in the newspaper report in describing "William Hine," against whom a warrant "on suspicion" had been issued. Moreover, Townshend had just called him "William," and mentioned that he was wanted by the police. But what could be the meaning of the man's allusion to Sir Ralph? Could it really

mean that the brute had the stains of two murders on his hands ?

"And who'll bloomin' well whisper?" said he. "Tell me that. Not you, Markess?"

"Not I, of course," said Townshend. "But you must lie low, William, if I'm going to pull you through."

"I can't lie low much longer. I'm sick o' this shop, I tell yer. Why can't we collar the bloomin' swag and hook it?"

"God damn the devil, man! Haven't I told you? I can't find it. I can't tell where the old man has hid it."

"What!" cried the other. "Not from that blessed letter?"

"No," said Townshend. "The letter wants the key to it, and that the old man has lodged with his banker."

"The bloomin' crafty old bunks!" exclaimed the other. "But I'll get at that swag if I pull the house down."

"Don't be a noisy fool, William," said Townshend, quietly. "We must move carefully, with this young chap and Miss Grimston in the house."

"Why don't you chuck the cove? The gal I don't mind; she's a bloomin' fine gal!"

"Come, none o' that, William," said Townshend, "or I'll lay you by the heels!"

"All right, Markess. Keep your hair on. I ain't a-going to do nothing to the gal."

This allusion to Cicely and myself agitated me, and I suppose my agitation was communicated to the curtain.

"What's that curtain moving for?" I heard the man demand, in a scared, husky voice. "Didn't you see it?"

"Never mind the curtain," said Townshend. "Curtains have a way of moving in a draughty place like this. You've got the jumps, William."

"Jumps be damned! And look there. There's a pair o' boots at the bottom! Now I'm going to see if there ain't no feet inside them boots!"

My heart stood still a moment with the sudden agitation, and then thumped furiously. I set my back against the wall, and waited for what might happen.

CHAPTER XII.

TRAPPED.

I leaned desperately back against the wainscot, prepared to defend myself. But as I leaned, the wall behind me gave way without a sound, and I stumbled—almost fell—backward into darkness. Then I perceived, by the faint light from the chamber I had left, that I had come through an oblong opening like a doorway. Instantly I felt for the door which must have swung open, found it, and swiftly pushed it to. It closed with a faint click, and I was in utter darkness.

All that took but a second or two, so that when the man Hine had crossed the floor and plucked back the curtain—(as I supposed he had done)—he saw nothing but a blank wall. I considered that in the noise of his own steps he, and probably Townshend also, had heard nothing of my rapid disappearance; for the door had moved without a sound, and my soft tennis shoes had saved me from making a noise when I stumbled. Moreover, I felt I was standing on a carpeted floor.

I waited, however, with trepidation; for I thought that in all likelihood Townshend, if not the other, would know of the secret door. I waited, but I heard nothing—not even the sound of their voices—and I began to imagine their bewilderment and to recover my self-possession.

I was escaped from a very great peril, and for a few moments I was filled with thankfulness. But then I began to consider that perhaps I was not truly escaped: I might have only avoided the teeth of one trap to fall into the box of another. I had no matches to strike a light. I could see, however, on one side against the dim evening sky, a window striped lengthwise with iron bars. I moved toward it, when I was shaken by surprise to hear the warning *wawl* of a cat, and to see gleaming upon me from the deep darkness of the room a pair of great round eyes. I wondered if it might be Cloots. I slowly approached, carefully feeling my way with hand and foot, for I did not know what obstacles I might stumble or collide against; and I called him softly and soothingly. He hushed his sounds of threatening, and at length I put my hand on his head, and felt that he was indeed Cloots. He leaped from his place—which my hand told me was on a pile of some soft woven stuff—and

rubbed himself against me in his usual manner, purring loudly the while.

"But how," I asked myself—"how has he come here? If there is a way in for him, there should be a way out for me."

Yet surely it would be strange if there was an open door. I felt along the wall against which I had discovered Cloots, but I found neither door nor hint of door. I groped along the next wall in the same manner, and with the same result: no sign nor suggestion of ingress or egress could I find. Through the third wall I knew I had come from the turret; and the fourth wall contained the window, and therefore could not contain any outlet except into space and night. How then had the cat entered?

Then the startling and terrible thought seized me that after all I *was* caught in a trap! The cat might enter and leave by some neglected hole that would not admit so much as my head. I turned to look at the creature again, and to be satisfied by the touch of him that I was not without living natural company in that unknown darkness. But I could not see the light of his eyes gleaming anywhere. I called him, but he did not answer with either touch or sound. Then the horrible fear

seized me and passed shivering over my hair and skin, that the creature I had seen had been but a phantom, or a projection of my excited and disordered brain. Yet I tried to reassure myself that I had heard the creature's voice and had touched its fur; and appearances are not phantoms if they have voice and substance. I again felt closely and carefully over the walls, high and low, close to the floor and over my head. And then I had thrust overwhelmingly on my notice what I had before but absently remarked: that against the walls here and there were piles of stuffs, and things that my hands judged to be pictures, and vases, and small pieces of bronze statuary. Why was all that property hid thus away? for hid it must be considered to be, since the entrance to the room was apparently a secret. I could not resolve myself where or how the cat was gone, but I was certain I had made a discovery of great importance. That helped to satisfy and to soothe me, and I went to the window to see if there was for me any escape that way.

I went to the window and looked up and down; it was in one close casement, the bars without were strong, and there was, moreover, no way of getting at them except by smashing both glasses and frame

of the window. There appeared then no escape from that mysterious room, unless I could find the secret snap-door by which I had entered; and even if I found it again and passed out that way, I should probably have to encounter the ruffian Hine. Must I then pace up and down, and to and fro, that chamber with its hidden treasures until I was exhausted, until I starved, or my reason gave way? The thought of the treasures again calmed me somewhat, and I began to regard with equanimity the prospect of remaining quietly in that room till the daylight filled it and disclosed its secret.

I thus stood at the window considering and looking out among the dark forms and shadows of the trees of the park, when I was amazed and frozen with horror to see between me and the forms and shadows of the trees, flitting up from among them on to the terrace of the house, two, three, four, five, six figures in cloaks and slouch hats. What impressed and moved me the more was that the dress they wore was the same as that of the ghostly figure that had passed the window and completely unnerved me on the first night of my stay at the Wytches. As they slipped cautiously up to the terrace—two first, and then another, and another passing swiftly through the belt of comparative light

—I remarked that one was very different from the others ; he ran in a fierce, ungainly manner which suggested that he had a club-foot, or a cork leg. Who were they, and what was the meaning of their coming thus like thieves in the night ? I at once thought of Cicely, and wondered furthermore if they were in collusion with Townshend and Hine. I watched them all pass up to the terrace, and slink and slip along in the shadows of the bushes, on toward the front of the house.

It was maddening to think that I was pent up in that room without hope of escape in time to be of service to Cicely in case she needed me ; and how great her need might chance to be I could only wildly guess. Was Betsy with her ? And where was Townshend ? Did he know of the coming of those men ? Were they colleagues or enemies ? If Townshend were at hand, I thought I would have little fear for Cicely ; for though I thought him a villain, I believed him to be a gentleman. But Townshend might not be at hand, and those night marauders might enter the house, and—I ranged round the room again to seek a way out. Better even to find the door by which I had entered and face Hine and all the consequences, than stay there trapped and maddened.

But first I boldly sounded the other walls with my fists. My success was greater than I had hoped for. The first blow I struck on the wall opposite that through which I had come rang hollow; it told plainly that it was a thin partition. I noted also that it was of wood, and therefore I judged that it might be of a single thickness. The fact, moreover, that I had come through a secret door in the other wall moved me to seek a similar door in this. Beginning at the end of the wall near the window, I ran my hands with the carefulest touch over every line and projection. I came upon nothing significant, however, until I was about the middle of the wall, when I felt a tolerably wide crack into which I could get my nail, and through which my lingering hand felt a distinct draught of air. I felt all along and down the crack till I reached the bulging skirt-board, which was only attained by moving a pile of heavy, velvety stuff. There—on the edge of the skirt-board—I touched what felt like the end of a broken, rusty nail. I pressed it down with my foot—(for it hurt my finger)—and a section of the wall, no wider than would admit me, swung noiselessly open. I stepped through the opening, and found myself pressed on all sides by an embarrassment of clothing—ladies' clothing, I found, by a cursory

touch of the light, flowing garments that hung around me. Pushing aside the discommoding skirts I saw, not a foot from my nose, a chink of light. I put out my hand to it, and to my amazement a door swung slowly open, and showed me the usual arrangements of a bed-room—a bed, a slowly sinking candle, a wash-stand, and a dressing-table. I had so lost my self-possession that I had to regard all these a second time before I perceived they must be those of a lady, and before I came to the exact conclusion, with the strangest thrill I had ever known of mingled fear and ecstasy, that I must have penetrated to the sacred presence of the sleeping Cicely.

But where was Betsy? And how was I, without reproach and shame, to make known my intrusion into this holy of holies? Yet how could I return into that dark trap from which I had come?

I stepped through the open door before me into the room, and turning, I saw that I had come through the back of a great, ancient wardrobe. Then I saw also why Sir Ralph (or his ancestors) had chosen to make this approach to the treasure-room through the wardrobe of a lady's bed-chamber, and why Sir Ralph's daughter was urged to be so frequently from home; a lady's room was less

likely than another to be explored by casual curiosity, and in the lady's absence the room could be entered without suspicion or offence.

I stood where I had issued from the wardrobe, and called softly :

“ Miss Grimston.”

There was no movement in the sleeping form, and I called again, a little louder :

“ Miss Grimston.”

Then she started up on her elbow, and put her hand to her head, showing a dazzling white arm.

“ Did anyone call ? ” she demanded. “ Who is there ? ”

“ It is I,” I answered, “ Halliday. Don't be alarmed.”

“ Mr. Halliday ! ” She had discovered where I stood and looked fearlessly and angrily at me. “ And what are you doing here in my room ? ”

“ Do — please — be calm, Miss Grimston,” I pleaded. “ God knows—you know—I am here for no harm. But you are in danger, and I am in a trap.”

I explained hurriedly, but sufficiently, how I had got there, and what I had seen from the window of the other room, and what I feared ; while she lay with the bed-clothes gathered close about her, leaving only her ears free to catch what I said.

"I would have tried," said I, "to get away by the door of your room, but that, I feared, I might startle you more than I have startled you now. Let me try now."

She said nothing, and I went to the door. It was locked on the inner side, and I at once laid my hand on the key to turn it. It would not turn! I guessed what might be the reason. I took my penknife and inserted a blade in the keyhole, and discovered, as I had expected, that something—a thick bent wire or what not—had been thrust into the lock from the other side, to prevent the key from being used or withdrawn. It was a burglar's well-known trick, which was significant.

"I can't get out," I said; "your door has been secured on the outside."

"And who has done that?" she demanded.

"These people, I suppose, who have come secretly to the house—though for what purpose they have done it, except to keep you shut in your room, I can't guess."

"And what does it all mean?" she demanded, again. "And what are we going to do? You can't stay here, Mr. Halliday. You must get out somehow!"

"Shall I go back into that room?" I asked,

"and take my chance of finding the other door and getting away through the turret. I'll do whatever you wish, but don't—please—be offended with me."

"No," she said; "you mustn't go back into that dreadful room."

She lay a moment or two in silence, considering.

"Can you leap?" she asked, "and climb trees?"

I answered that I could.

"Draw aside the blind of my window," she said, "and look out."

I went to the window and did as she requested.

"Now," she asked, "what do you see?"

"I see," answered I, "the park and the terrace— and opposite the window a wide-spreading tree— with a great branch reaching out for the window— and almost touching it."

"That's the tree and the branch," said she; "my brother used to get in and out of this room that way. But, oh, it looks to me so dangerous. Do you think you can do it?"

I looked again, measuring with my eye the distance of the end of the bough from the window.

"I think," said I, "I can reach it by standing on the window-sill and holding your hand."

"My brother used to leap straight out and catch it," said she. "But, of course, you can't do that; it is dark, and it is the first time you have tried. Yes, I'll give you my hand, if you will let me put something on."

"Certainly," said I, looking steadily through the window.

Even at that critical moment her words—"I'll give you my hand"—smote me with their double edge and made me thrill, and with the folly of young love I thought it of happy augury that she had used them.

In a second or two she was by my side, attired in a ravishing dressing-gown. She was, however, quite self-possessed. I had opened the window wide, and she looked out into the gulf of darkness.

"Oh!" she cried, "it's too dreadful! I can't let you do it."

"I must do it, Miss Grimston," said I; "there is no other way."

"But if you should fall! Oh, horrible!"

"I'll not fall," said I, getting out upon the window-sill. "Please give me your hand, and don't mind if I hold it tight."

She gave me her hand without more ado, leaning

out after me, and holding on by the window-sash. With my right hand I hooked myself well on to the extended bough, and then let go Cicely's hand and swung off.

"Oh!" she cried, as the bough bent and cracked a little under my weight.

"I am quite safe," I whispered. "Close your window quietly: There are people below."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN IN THE CLOAK.

On turning my face toward the house as I swung I had seen into the kitchen over the top of the high shutters of its window. One glance had shown me Townshend standing by the kitchen table, on which stood several wine-bottles (the most notable being sloping-shouldered bottles of champagne), and some half a dozen men in cloaks and soft shady hats sitting round about. I feared to hang there any longer between heaven and earth; I might be discovered, or the strength of my wrists and shoulders might give way. I swung myself, therefore, toward the trunk of the tree, hand over hand, and then swarmed down. I was about my own height from the ground when I thought I heard a footstep, and in my haste to descend the remaining distance I fell—fell with my foot under me. I sat a moment or two on the turf to let the pain pass, and it was probably well for

me that I did ; for while I sat a figure in slouched hat and long cloak flitted along the terrace and away among the trees. His haste, and the direction he took, made me suspect he was heading for the railway station, and I resolved to follow him, and act as occasion suggested.

I had "shadowed" him painfully for some distance, and was thinking of striking ahead of him, having perceived he must be making not for Wintop but for the Junction, when a man sprang on me and smote me a stunning blow on the top of the head. I dropped on my knees, at the same time as I caught and clung to the hand that struck. I was a practised foot-ball player, and I adopted a foot-ball trick. I butted my assailant in the stomach and with my arm tripped him up. We rolled on the ground together, he puffing and cursing under his breath, and I nimble and strong with rage. With a turn and wriggle I was on top of him, with my knees on his chest, one hand gripping his throat, and the other wrenching from his right hand what he had struck with. It seemed, however, more than I could do to make the right hand lose its hold. In spite of all I might have come the worse off, for I was scarcely heavy enough to oppress my opponent, had not Cloots come to

my aid. With the scream of a true wild cat he sprang at the left arm of the man, which was striving its utmost to throttle me, and fastened on it with tooth and claw. Then I secured my prize from the right hand and shook myself free.

"Oh, the bloomin' brute!" he cried, struggling to his feet. "Oh, the devil!"

"Cloots!" I called. "Cloots! Come away, you beast! Puss! Puss!" I cried, scarce knowing what I said. But Cloots did not heed me; he held on and screamed, while the man (whom I was now convinced was Hine) roared and cursed, and struck him with his right hand.

I feared to interfere forcibly; for the man might turn again on me if I were to his hand when he was freed from the cat. A device occurred to me which I carried out. I started off at a run, calling the cat with a thrilling sound which I had already practised upon him; I knew he answered my call from the cessation of his victim's shouts and curses.

Presently I saw the man again on his feet, and brandishing his fists. "Now come on again, you beggar! I'm for you!"

I had something other to do, however, than to fight. The man in the cloak was, of course, by that

time far out of sight. That was of the less consequence as I thought I knew where he was going; but I set off running to overtake him, and my assailant ran after me. But he was a heavy man, and he soon dropped completely behind.

It was fortunate I was so lightly shod; I could swing along at a good pace without fatigue. And as I swung along I felt and considered the thing I had wrenched from my assailant's hand. It was small—it did no more than fill the palm of the hand—and it was fitted with a strap, so that (clearly) it might be worn as a groom wears a horse-brush. It was heavy; it seemed, indeed, no more than a rounded lump of lead covered with leather, from which protruded a murderous spike or gad, like that with which cricketing shoes are furnished. As I fixed it in my palm and swung my hand, I felt it must be a formidable weapon when attached to a long, strong arm. It was clearly intended to pierce the skull, and I could only think I had escaped a fatal experience of its quality because I wore a thick Scotch cap with a big bob where the blow fell—unless the blow had been intended to stun and not to murder, in which case I might have been struck only with the side of the thing. I could not forget, however, that

there were two specially vulnerable points in a man's skull—the crown and the temple—and that I had been struck on the one, and *the man of the Camberwell tavern* on the other. The suspicion, of course, lay ready that this was the very weapon with which he had been felled.

I vaulted over the park wall, though I was by no means sure I was at the proper point of crossing. I knew, however, how the railway line lay, and I steered straight for it by the little compass I wore at my watch-chain—I managed to read it by the suffused glimmer of the autumn night. I labored over ploughed fields and plunged through hedges and ditches. I felt I was not on the proper track; I saw nothing of the man in the cloak, but still I toiled on, and I had the satisfaction at length of coming out upon the line, though at some distance from the Junction. I saw the station lights, however, and made speed along the road, stepping on the platform just as a train entered.

I espied the man in the cloak, heard the porters shout "London express," and waited. There was no bustle; I could see none but the man in the cloak enter the train, and I walked by to note the number of his carriage.

"Step in, sir, if you're going on!" called an official.

"I'm not going," I answered, and the man eyed my hot and miry condition askance. When the train was gone, I turned to the official (who seemed an under-station-master or something of the kind) and said I wanted to telegraph.

"Can't telegraph to-night, sir—too late." And he was walking carelessly away.

"Look here!" I called. "I *must* telegraph. It's business of the greatest importance."

"Can't help that, sir."

"Don't be obstinate," I said, assuming as large and easy a manner as I could. "It's official; it's Queen's business. And you'll have to reckon with the Government if it's not attended to. D'you think I'd have come racing through hedge and ditch for nothing?"

At the same time I administered a half-sovereign, though I could ill afford it.

"Of course, sir," said he, looking with respect at the coin, "if it's really official——"

He took me to the telegraph office.

"When does the express reach London?" I asked.

"Two-fifty," he answered.

This, then, was my telegram :

"Bygrove, detective, Scotland Yard.

"Man from Junction by 2.50 ; close-shaved, slouch hat, and cloak ; carriage 1044. Tall dark here ; also fair farmer-looking and gang. Quick. Halliday."

"All right, sir," said the man, with a curious look after he had read the telegram. "It shall go at once."

I did not propose to return as I had come ; I doubted whether I could find the way. I walked leisurely by the road to Wintop, and on by the church. I passed quickly along the churchyard path, and with something of a shudder, I confess ; for the bald, white grave-stones rearing their tops from the thick mist that clung to the rank grass seemed inhuman and repulsive. Here an upright slab was shaped on its upper edge into the ghastly presentment of a head with rudimentary wings on each side, and there on a flat stone lay what looked like a petrified mummy. I hurried away. As I passed the dense shadow of the yew-tree I was startled almost out of myself by a black creature leaping from the top of a flat, coffer-like tomb. It was Cloots. I called him, and he came. I caressed

him gratefully, for he had materially aided my escape from the gross big man, and I tried to get him to accompany me back to the house, but he would not come; he refused to leave the shadow of the yew-tree. He had disappeared in that same corner when he accompanied me in the morning. "What special interest had he there?" I asked myself. "A family to tend? Or what?"

I continued on my way, wondering at Cloots. The track was by no means clear, and I am tolerably certain, from the length of the grass through which I walked, that I had left it, when I made a small discovery which moved me very much; it waked strange possibilities and suggestions in my mind. Dragging my feet in the grass—and especially the foot I had hurt in my fall—I kicked out something. I picked it up; it was a slipper—a man's slipper. I felt it all over, and considered it in what light I had. It was worn, yet scarcely so worn as to have been flung away, and it clearly had once been one of a fine pair; it was of yellow morocco, I thought, and had doubtless belonged to a person of consequence.

I stuck a stick in the ground where I had found it, put it in my pocket, and walked on to the house, marking with my knife the trees on the way.

Have you ever known what it is to be pushed or dragged on in a course of action, so engrossed with the interest or danger of each step that you do not consider whither you are tending or whence you have come, till some occasion arises—some new turn presents itself—that shows you how far you have strayed and how deeply you are involved? Such a moment to me was this discovery of the slipper. I feared to face fully the horrible suspicion it conjured up, but I could not avoid seeing that there was now no turning back for me, that I must struggle through this mystery to the end, for the sake of justice and honor, for my own sake, and for Cicely's.

When I reached the door of the house, I found it locked! What was to be done? I did not dare to ring or knock, and still I feared whether Cicely were safe. Yet, even if she were in danger, what could I do by violently entering the house and contending with six or seven daring and unscrupulous ruffians? I guessed that since Betsy was not with her young mistress she had probably returned to the lodge, and I resolved to seek shelter and take counsel with her.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SCRAP OF PAPER.

I painfully walked the mile or so to the lodge, and knocked. Betsy took little waking, and she received me kindly. I was glad I had thought of going to her, for—having explained something of the reason of my being locked out—I got from her one or two curious bits of information.

First of all, she recognized the slipper I had in my pocket as being one of Sir Ralph's favorite wear. Then she told me that Townshend, to whom she seemed to have a real antipathy, was a son of Sir Ralph's first wife—the "play-acting woman"—by a former husband.

"So they say," remarked Betsy; "but i' my opinyun she was like th' woman i' th' gaspel. 'Th' 'ast 'ad five 'usbands,' says he, 'an' him th' 'ast now bain't thy 'usband.' That was th' sort she was, I do b'lieve." And Betsy sniffed the sniff of a righteous woman.

She said, further, that Townshend had been sec-

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retary before me, and had been sent away, she believed, because he "*would* make up" to Miss Cicely; which information did not incline me better toward him or make me less anxious about Cicely's present situation.

The most notable piece of information, however, I must give, as well as I can, in Betsy's own words. She had spoken of the influence Townshend had with Sir Ralph, and she said:

"Pore Sir Ralph! Th' last time I saw him alone wi' 'im was a day or two afore you come—well, it might be three days. Let's see. 'Twas on th' Friday, and you come on th' Tuesday. 'E was wi' Sir Rafe, and they 'ad 'igh words. I couldn' 'elp 'earin' it, as I was about doin' up."

"In the morning, do you mean?" I asked.

"I' th' mornin'? No," she said; "i' th' arternoon. I just 'appened to be up there. I ain't inquisitive; I don' wan' to be inquisitive; I pray God I mayn' be inquisitive, for it's a wearin' thing; but I could *not* 'elp 'earin' that. Never you tell Sir Rafe 'ow I told you, or it 'ud be more 'n I' worth! Well, they quarrelled, and Mr. Townshend he up and outs, and away he goes wi' his bag. The very next day he comes back wi' a big, fine, fair-colored gentleman——"

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"Townshend and a big, fair man?" I exclaimed.
"In the afternoon again?"

"Now, Mr. 'Alltheday, don' you flurry me wi' your questions so quick and sharp. Don't you do it. I'm talkin' to you in a quiet, friendly way, and tellin' you just straight off what I see and hear. I th' arternoon it was; and what o' that? I thank God I ain't inquisitive, but I cannot 'elp it if I 'appen to be about, and folk appear afore my e'en and things get into my ears. As I was a-sayin', the very next day this Mr. Townsend an' a big, fine, fair-colored gentleman turns up, and 'ad 'igh words wi' Sir Rafe. 'Pair o' damned rascals,' he ca'd them, and sech-like; an' told 'em never to show their faces there again, callin' them and their faces things unfit. The fair gentleman stood up to 'im 'ot and strong, and gave as good as he got."

"Did they really quarrel?" I asked, with the deepest interest.

"Now, Mr. 'Alltheday," she said, evidently seeing no momentousness in a "yea" or a "nay," "there you are again. I won't say 'e did an' I won't say 'e didn'; for I didn' see, I on'y 'eard; 'twas i' the study it' appened, and summat about a letter."

"And did you see them go after that?" I inquired.

"I did not see them go, Mr. 'Alltheday. How should I, when I was back here afore dark?"

"And on Saturday?" I asked.

"On Saturday," said she, "and you come on th' Tuesday."

What more Betsy told me was of no consequence, though it was now clear that, in spite of her protestations, she had been as inquisitive as she could contrive to be, and I quickly expressed a desire to sleep. And though Betsy could only give me her little kitchen settle, I slept without interruption until she called me to go with her up to the house.

She had a way of entering by undoing with a knife the catch of the dining-room window, and I soon was upstairs in my room without Townshend and his comrades, I hoped, being aware of my escapade. I had evidence that my door had been secured as Cicely's had been: I found a broken bit of wire on my mat, and on proceeding to examine Cicely's door I found that the wire there also had been abstracted.

I breakfasted alone, and thought it ominous that I saw nothing of Townshend and his crew. As it drew toward nine o'clock, I sent Betsy to ask Cicely if she would like a cup of tea, and to show her the

slipper I had found. In a few moments she was downstairs, standing before me.

"This is my poor father's slipper, of course," said she; "where did you find it?"

I described the where, and something of the how.

"And you were about almost all night, Betsy tells me."

"A few hours, not nearly all night," I answered.

She looked at me and lingered, and blushed, till I thought never had a girl looked so sweet and ravishing, and my heart was melted to wax. Then she impulsively held out her hand to me.

"Mr. Halliday," said she, in the humblest and most seductive of tones, "forgive me. I should not have let you go as you did. You might have fallen and broken your neck! I am completely ashamed of myself!"

Forgiveness, I answered, was not a word to be used between us; there had been no alternative for me but to leave her in the way I did; and I was ready to risk everything for one whom I had learned to think so highly of even before I saw her.

"How do you mean?" she asked, with a quick look.

"From a photograph I found in a corner of the drawing-room," I answered, and she looked down and blushed again.

"I have not so many friends," said she, recovering herself, with a touch of pride, "but that I should be glad to have one more. It's very kind of you to think so much of me;" and she blushed again. "Are you any relation," she asked, suddenly, "of Mr. James Halliday, the author?"

"He was my father," I answered.

"And he is dead?"

"Yes," I answered; "in Spain, about a month ago."

"How very sad for you!" said she. "I am sure we shall be good friends, and I hope we shall have some pleasant times when my father returns."

I said nothing, and she quickly raised her eyes from her father's slipper, which she fingered on the table.

"I try to put away," she passionately burst forth, "the dreadful idea that some mischief has happened to my father! You don't speak! Do you think mischief *has* really come to him?"

I could say nothing at the moment, but involuntarily my eyes sought the slipper which she still fingered.

"I know," said she, holding the thing up, "that this and the other things we have spoken about, must tempt everybody to a terrible suspicion."

"At the same time," said I, at length, "all that we have seen yet can be explained on the ground of his having gone, or been forced away, in very great haste. Have you never guessed that Sir Ralph must have had some strange dealings with Mr. Townshend and other men?"

"I have! I have!" she admitted.

At that moment we were startled by a heavy body being flung against the door, and I awoke to the fact that we were standing tête-à-tête at the kitchen table.

"Oh!" she cried, grasping my wrist on the sudden, "I had forgotten about those men you told me of! They must not find us here! How shall we get away?"

I said nothing, but drew my revolver at the same moment as the door was dashed violently open. I was desperately ready to face a band of ruffians, but I only saw Betsy with a pile of wood in her arms, which she dropped on perceiving my threatening attitude.

"It's only me, sir!" she cried. "It's only Betsy!"

At that Cicely and I laughed, which Betsy took somewhat unkindly.

"A body would think," said she, "that there was nought but robbers about."

Cicely smiled, and gave me her hand again, and departed.

I could have detained her talking all the day, only to look at her and hear her voice. Of course, I was irrevocably in love. There is no doubt that love is at first an intoxicant. Some it makes sodden and helpless (as other intoxicants do), others it stimulates and braces up. It stimulated me, and gave my faculties fresh quickness and ardor. And I think I may say, without being charged with mere selfishness of feeling, that I had the more hope of my love because I suspected that her father would no more return than mine. I was determined, at any rate, to be quickly resolved about his absence.

I walked out of doors, and set myself to arrange the suspicious points that began to bristle about Sir Ralph's disappearance. I marked them off on my fingers: (1) On Saturday last he quarrelled with two men (suspected in another matter), one of whom knocked him down; this last point not established; (2) from Saturday his bed was not slept in; (3) he had not been seen at any of the neighboring railway

stations; (4) he had disappeared without hat or boots; (5) one slipper of a pair he was fond of wearing had been found at some considerable distance from the house.

Having got thus far, I traced my way back to where I had found the slipper. I examined the ground all around for signs of disturbance, but I could find none. But now I noted that this way and that over the spot where I had found the slipper ran a narrow track through the tall, tangled grass. I was thinking how the track could have been made when Cloots appeared trotting along it with tail erect, and then I guessed that he must have made it. It clearly was not an old track; for the grass was only laid, not worn. Was it older than the deposition of the slipper? Or, had the two facts any connection but the connection of coincidence? Meanwhile my attention was drawn to Cloots. He stuck affectionately to me, and impeded my movements by rubbing and twisting about my legs. If I moved farther off from the house he accompanied me; if I moved nearer to the house he kept aloof. I was considering this peculiarity of his behavior when I was surprised to see a man with a black bag appearing from the direction of the churchyard. It was the detective, Bygrove.

"You did very well last night," he said at once, when we met; "an excellent stroke of business," holding up the bag. "But you did not know the man had a bag containing a damning piece of evidence against himself."

"What was that?" I asked.

"A peculiar bottle of wine," said he, with a grin.

I stared, but he only held up the bag to me again. "The arrival by the two-fifty is in safe keeping; and I've something here for the other gentlemen. Now tell me about them. Is Miss Grimston here, by the way?"

I answered she was; and I told him all I had seen and heard both of Townshend and the others, in the turret, in the dark room of my stay, and in the lodge with Betsy—not omitting my well-nigh fatal adventure with Hine. I showed him the curious weapon I had become possessed of.

"Ah, that's valuable," said he; "you'd better give it to me, if you please." And, he continued, "Sir Ralph's not yet back, I suppose?"

"No," I answered; "and I shouldn't be surprised if he never came back. When a man goes without hat or boots, and drops a slipper on the way, it looks to me like foul play."

"Eh?" he said. "It does—does it? I shouldn't

wonder if you're right." And he smiled grimly and encouragingly, so that I felt young and amateurish. "But," he continued, "what do you mean about hat and boots and slippers?"

I explained to him Cicely's discovery and my own.

"H'm," said he. "Certainly, it looks bad. Yes. It works in with the rest. But, for the present, I must leave Sir Ralph alone."

"Why so?" I asked, thinking of Cicely's position and my own.

"Well, you see," said he, with a smile, "Sir Ralph only concerns me indirectly. Murder, indeed, is not much in my line of business at all; I'm after bigger business than that. We're for the protection of life and property, they say; but you see," he said, with a laugh, "life doesn't pay, and property does. And by the way, I owe you an apology."

"Me?"

"You. I took you for one of the gang."

"Gang? What gang?"

"I'll explain in a moment. I took you for one of them; but I see now I made a mistake—I found out about you in town—and I apologize."

This rather amazed me, and I asked again, "But what gang did you think me one of?"

He stopped under the trees, looked all round him, and then came close to me with emphatic finger.

"A gang of cracksmen," said he, in a low voice, "swell and not swell. They've worked high and low, country houses and town houses, at home and abroad, for years, going for jewels and plate, but mostly for jewels. None of the property has ever been found, and none of the gang caught. They've worried me and the whole of Scotland Yard. I've all along been sure they've been worked by clever heads, and now I know it—now I'm on their tracks, and I believe that I'm not a hundred miles from the centre of their web, and that the chief of the whole gang is Sir Ralph Grimston!"

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed.

"Wait, and see. You've helped me, and I hope you'll help me still, so we'd better overhaul all that we have found out about this business, Sir Ralph's affair and all; for I'm certain they all hang together."

I felt somewhat preoccupied with the thought of the strange position the detective had supposed me to occupy as one of a gang of criminals, but I again went over to him all I had discovered. In return he told me he had found out that Townshend had long been on intimate terms with Sir

Ralph Grimston, and had been frequently seen with him in town, at Sir Ralph's club and elsewhere. He then produced again that scrap with Sir Ralph's signature and asked me to read what was on the other side. The tearing had of course been broken through some words, and some of the expressions were incomplete, but for all that charged with meaning. It read thus :

" ings all in order in case.
 ld you to take care of the wine and .
 . . . ink bottles. Be very careful of my di. .
 . . . been done for you, and after all I have on. . .
 . . . a freebooter as our ancestors were. Forgive
 me, my son, I have a presentiment I shall not last
 much longer. I leave you to restore our name. . . "

"Now," said Bygrove, "I want to get the whole of that letter. I have tried to puzzle out what the bits wanting must be. In the first line I make 'I shall put th. . .' at the beginning, and ' . . . of trouble,' at the end; in the second line 'I have to. . .' at the beginning, and—I'm damned if I know what at the end or after that much. 'Walnuts' won't do. And why in the world should he advise the 'ink bottles' to be looked after? Or, can it be 'dr-ink bottles?' But that would be nonsense. What fixes my notice, however, first is

the word '*wine*.' There must be something particular about it to have it mentioned twice, for he says '*I have told you*.' The next thing that fixes me is that this letter was written to Sir Ralph's son, and that it has missed its destination; been stolen before posted or after. Now it is plain, isn't it? that some of the gang somehow knew of the letter; perhaps they thought there was a valuable secret in it—that they took possession of it."

"Violent possession," I suggested, looking at the torn scrap.

"Violent possession," Bygrove assented; "and so the thing got torn."

"In being wrenched from Sir Ralph's hand?" I asked.

"I think not," said he, frowning in tight thought and pursing his mouth. "I think Sir Ralph, wherever he has gone, has not been in town this time; I think the letter was torn by the person, whoever he is—who snatched it from the grasp of the man murdered in that back-room in Camberwell."

I turned over what he said, and regarded the scrap.

"There is another thing that strikes me," I said,

"indeed, two other things. There must be something curious about the wine; for Townshend told me it was the choicest in the county."

"Oh, he knows it, does he? And didn't it strike you as odd that the very poorest family in the county should have the very choicest wine? Depend on it, there's more in that wine than meets the eye."

"The other thing," said I, pointing to the scrap and returning it, "that occurs to me is that this word, or part of a word, on the third line is not '*ink*,' but '*inth*.' Is that '*k*' or '*th*'?"

"I must look at it," said he, hurriedly putting the scrap into his pocketbook. "And I must get hold of the rest of that letter and know all about that curious wine. We must move on, though; we may be watched, for all we know."

CHAPTER XV.

A DUELLO OF WITS.

When we approached the house we saw no sign of life. It looked so silent and mysterious, and withal so threatening, that I was not surprised to hear Bygrove say:

"I should *not* like to put up here, even for a night."

We entered, and Bygrove waited in the hall while I made known his presence to Cicely. She came to him at once. I think she must have expected he had brought her father home; for she appeared pale and agitated, and she looked past the detective anxiously out to the gravel sweep.

Bygrove proceeded to tell her the business he had come upon—that for sufficient reasons connected with the disappearance of her father and the appearance there of men suspected of no good, he must search the house. I thanked him in my heart for the gentle and cloudy way in which he put to her the stern necessity that was upon him.

"And you have not found out anything about my father?" she asked.

"Well, Miss Grimston, I have and I haven't. I have found out so much that I have come to the conclusion that he has not been in London this time."

"And now you will set to work, please, to discover what's become of him."

She had just uttered the words—"what's become of him"—when Townshend appeared from the depth of the house descending the stairs. The light fell on him so that his eye-glass shone like a burning lens; and he seemed to tower so above us from his position on the stairs, his thick, tufted head of hair, his hawk nose, and his long, lean throat made him look so like a black vulture; and altogether he appeared so self-possessed and capable, and so destructive and pitiless, that for the first time I was smitten with a genuine dread of him. As he came down to us I noted that he was as neatly attired, as clean, cool, and agreeable as usual.

"Ah," said he, "I am *de trop*, I dare say?"

"No," said Cicely, "I think not. You are as much interested in our business as anyone."

Thereupon I introduced Bygrove to him—rather

awkwardly, I fear—as the gentleman of Scotland Yard whom Cicely had mentioned. He seemed as easy as though Bygrove's presence portended no harm to him.

“Ah, yes,” said he, “and your Scotch friend; pleased to make his acquaintance, and I shall be glad to render him what service I can.”

Bygrove, on his part, assumed a deferential and somewhat stupid bearing, though from his talk with me I was convinced he not only had no feeling of deference, but was also tolerably quick in his self-esteem. His intention, clearly, was to pass himself off as the common or garden detective who rises from the rank of policeman, so that, he might as little as possible rouse the suspicions of Townshend.

“Thank you, sir,” said he. “And since you're so obliging as to offer to help I'll take it very kind, and so'll the lady, I'm sure, if you'll show me over the house. I believe you know it as well as, or better than, anybody.”

“Oh, yes,” said Townshend, letting his eye-glass shine a moment on Bygrove; “yes, I know it.”

“I'll leave you, then,” said Cicely, and departed.

“Now, Mr. Townshend,” said Bygrove, “if

you're ready, sir, we'll start with a confidential chat over things."

"An' you love me," said Townshend, laying the back of his hand on Bygrove's waistcoat, "defer business till we have refreshed the inner man: lunch first, law afterward; for I presume you have some curious point of detective business to pose me with. I must always lunch early, because I eat no breakfast; and you must be hungry after your journey. So, let us eat and drink, and then say on. God damn the devil, man! I believe I'm almost clever enough to be a detective myself! Eh?"

"A slap-up detective you'd make, Mr. Townshend, I ain't got a doubt. And it's a pity that the authorities can't make up their minds to spend a little in getting a gentleman or two."

"When they can make up," answered Townshend, "the concatenation of diabolical prejudices they call their mind, I'll put in."

"And if you did, sir," said Bygrove, "wouldn't the cracksmen have to look out?—That's all!"

"Now you're getting beyond me," said the other; "you have the advantage of knowing the professional jargon. But all this is by the way. We must see about lunch, for," said he with a

smile," I'll have to act both as cook and as host. Shall we lay in the kitchen or the study?" he asked of me.

"The kitchen, sir, I should say, if I may put in a word," said Bygrove; he thought, I suppose, that he would be better able there to keep Townshend under his eye without suspicion.

"Yes," said Townshend, "I think the kitchen will do. What do you say, Halliday?"

"The kitchen, certainly," said I. "I dare say Miss Grimston would prefer a tray by herself."

"Right, as always," said he. "So the kitchen be it."

I proceeded to lay the cloth, and Townshend set himself to cook with his usual lightness of touch and engrossment of attention. When my part was done I could not help considering him with admiration, and wondering at his coolness and address in his peculiar situation; and I had yet to understand how desperate and solitary that situation really was. Meantime, I knew he could not miss comprehending what business Bygrove had come upon; all the while he was aware that six or seven unscrupulous ruffians were close at hand (where they could be except in the turret, I could not guess), to be kept carefully under control whether they were

his allies or his enemies. Bygrove also, I saw, must have been struck with something of the same view. He watched his adroit cooking with amazement and praised it with overwhelming ardor, insomuch that Townshend, I thought, looked even a little put off his guard by the flattery. But presently they both showed themselves warily on the defensive: when Townshend proposed to go by himself to bring a bottle or two of wine from the cellar, Bygrove proposed to accompany him, and then the former began to look resolutely serious.

"I've heard, sir," said Bygrove, "of the choice wines of this house, and I should like to see the splendid cellar where they must be kept."

"Oh," said Townshend, with a steady look at me, "not much of a place after all. Come along."

So we all three went to seek the wine with a candle. But to my astonishment Townshend led us, not to the great cellar to which I had been introduced, but to a small one closer at hand. He opened it with a key which was in the door.

"There you are," said he, motioning Bygrove in, while he looked hard at me aside.

I said nothing, but Bygrove expressed his disappointment.

"Well," said he, "there must have been a deal

of talk about nothing: *I* don't think much of *this* for a cellar. Fine lot o' wine it may be, sir, for all that—what there is of it."

And with that he began tapping with a fork which he had happened—on purpose, I dare say, to carry down with him—tapping as if absently or carelessly on one bottle, and another, and a third.

Townshend evidently considered him with surprise a moment, as if he were putting to himself the question:—"Now, what the devil is he doing that for? Does he mean anything or nothing?"

"May I suggest a bottle of 'ock, Mr. Townshend?" said Bygrove. "I'm passionately fond of 'ock: it always looks to me as if gold had been melted in it and had got soaked even into the bottle."

"God damn the devil, sir!" said Townshend. "For a detective you've got a very pretty fanciful turn of language."

And he regarded him with fresh perplexity.

"But good 'ock," continued Bygrove, "of that fine golden look, ain't 'ardly to be 'ad for money."

"Well," said Townshend, "you shall have this without money, so far as I'm concerned."

So saying, he took from a bin a bottle of hock, and with it and a bottle of claret we returned to the kitchen.

When we had finished eating we sat over our wine with our arms amicably on the table, as if we were the pleasantest and most confidential friends in the world, as if we had not a secret the one from the other, as if each (of two of us, at least) was not contriving with all possible tension of brain and nerve against the liberty, if not the life, of the other. A duel of wits I saw was impending between Townshend and the detective, and I awaited it with an absorbed interest. What did the detective hope to make of Townshend without introducing the violence of the law? And what means did Townshend hope would avail to baffle the detective?

"It's a pity to break up agreeable conversation, sir," said Bygrove, "but yet business is business."

"You'd like to talk with Mr. Townshend alone," I said, rising to leave them.

"Not at all," they said, together; "sit still."

So I sat still, and watched the fencing between them; the astute detective opposite me and the alert and gay criminal on my right, and I must confess my admiration and sympathy began to incline very much toward the criminal—toward the man, that is, that had the long odds against him.

Townshend made a good point to start with; he touched his adversary, so to say, at the first pass.

"I see," said he, "that you have brought my bag back."

"Yes," said Bygrove, with a lifting of the eyebrow; "I have—along with what it contained."

"Ah," said the other, "you should not have done that; you should have retained it."

"Well, I have retained it, Mr. Townshend," said the detective, "and brought it here again, so that it may bear me out in the question I now put to you: What is it, in the eyes of the law, to take and to send property—though it's only a bottle of very golden wine—out of a house in which you have no right, without the knowledge of the owner?"

I could not for the moment guess what Bygrove meant by the "damning" discovery in the bag of a "bottle of very golden wine;" though it was clear to me afterward.

"Now, Mr. Bygrove," said the other, "that's a conundrum. I'll answer it with another: 'How does the law regard you if, when you have discovered stolen property, you send the authorities a specimen of it, so that they may know where to come and find more?' I should say the law regarded you with singular approval—in fact, smiled upon you."

"And that is what you did?" asked Bygrove—

his jaw inclined to drop with astonishment at the audacity of the other.

"That is what I did; I sent you the bag by a special messenger, who ought to have been detained for the sake of society. I hope he was?"

"He is," answered Bygrove.

There was a pause, at the end of which Bygrove shook his head, and said, "It won't do, Mr. Townshend—not that game. I've found out all about the stolen property without your help."

"All?" said Townshend.

"Quite enough for the present. But I'll be frank with you, Mr. Townshend. You're made for better things—you'll excuse my saying so—than those you've got mixed up in. You and the man Hine are the last people known to have seen and talked to Sir Ralph, and you're in this Camberwell affair, too, you know."

"Me?" said Townshend, with what appeared genuine astonishment. "In the Camberwell affair?"

"Yes. This gentleman—Mr. Halliday—saw you."

"Mr. Halliday saw me?" exclaimed he, turning his shining eye-glass on me.

"I saw from the train," said I, "a tall, dark man strike another man down."

Mr. Townshend's eyebrows moved with a spasmodic jerk, and his eye-glass fell; these were all the signs he showed of disturbance, while Bygrove, I thought, looked ill-pleased that I had put the matter so unemphatically and impersonally.

"Really, Mr. Detective!" said he, "your suspicions are racing far ahead of facts."

"Pooh, Mr. Townshend! Pooh!" said Bygrove. "Tell that to the Horse Marines!"

"You find me," persisted the other, "a harmless private individual, with a curious taste for cookery, and you can establish nothing against me."

"Now, Mr. Townshend," said Bygrove, "no nonsense. Right or wrong, you're in a mess. I'll pledge myself and the office to get you taken as evidence, if you make a clean breast of the whole bag of tricks. I don't ask you to put my hand on your gang of cracksmen——"

"Cracksmen? Do be intelligible, Mr. Detective."

"Now," said Bygrove, impatiently, "what's the use of saying that? You know! First of all, I want you to give me the letter, of which that is the torn end."

He laid the scrap on the table, with his hand upon it.

"If I understand you aright," said Townshend, briskly—after a pause in which he looked in his wine-glass and made its few remaining drops trickle about its sides—"you are proposing something very dishonorable to me. I don't pretend to be the best of men, but I have never consciously done anything dishonorable. And I won't, now," he continued, tossing back his mass of black hair, while his hawk-like nose looked more soaring and hawk-like than ever, and the Adam's apple in his lean throat moved more emphatically. That letter, though, is another matter. You mean, that is, the bit found in the hand of the dead man at Camberwell?"

"I do," said the detective.

"Then," said Townshend, "I propose that we put your piece and my piece side by side, and that we both read both hands down. What do you say?"

CHAPTER XVI.

BINTH.

Bygrove steadily considered Townshend for a moment or two, as if trying to measure the depth of his purpose and the extent of his trustworthiness.

"Very well," said he at length. "Agreed. Table your portion."

Deliberately Townshend drew forth a pocket-book, opened it, and took out the crimped and mutilated half-sheet of note-paper of which the detective held the lower section. He clapped it on the table, covering it with his hand as Bygrove covered his.

In the excitement of the game I had risen from my place, and moved round, so that I stood overlooking both hands.

"Now," said Bygrove.

They removed their hands together according to agreement, and held them down beneath the table. They each greedily cast their eyes on the other's portion. On the detective's nothing but the signa-

ture "*Ralph Grimston*" was to be seen: he had exhibited the valueless side of the scrap. Townshend covered his portion again with his hand.

"Come, Mr. Detective," said he; "that's not playing square. That signature is nothing. I knew it was there, I must see the other side."

"I know the other side has something useful on it," said Bygrove, "but I don't know that you are showing me the part really wanting to my bit."

"Now," said Townshend, "that is an unjust suspicion. I appeal to Mr. Halliday, who knows Sir Ralph's handwriting. Is not this I hold under my hand written by Sir Ralph? And did you not catch any line or phrase that would make you judge this to be the other part of the note?"

"I think," answered I, "that it is written in Sir Ralph's hand, and I certainly read "*your loving father*," which would have come on top of the signature."

"Then I suspect, Mr. Townshend," said Bygrove, with a smile, "you showed me your wrong side."

"I don't know," said Townshend, "which side you may consider the right one. However, I'll show you the other of mine, if you will show the other of yours."

"It just strikes me," said Bygrove, "that you have the advantage of me, Mr. Townshend. You know Sir Ralph's writing very well and can read it off at a glance: I don't. We're not on equal terms to start with."

"Very well," said Townshend; "I'll give you the advantage. Here's Mr. Halliday, who knows Sir Ralph's handwriting——"

"Not so well as you," interrupted Bygrove.

"Not so well, perhaps, as I, but still well enough. Well, I'll give you him as partner. Surely you can't complain of that as a handicap."

I said nothing. Bygrove looked at me, and I signified my agreement with a look.

"So be it, then," said he.

Both turned their fragments over, and held their hands down, and again concentrated their eyes on the writing. It had been exposed for but four or five seconds, when, with a short "Ah!" of surprised discovery, Townshend raised his hand, coolly took up his paper, folded it, and put it in his pocket.

"What's that for?" asked Bygrove, in some heat. "I've had no time."

"We made no agreement about time," said Townshend, quietly. "I have seen all I wanted to

see, and if you have not, that's your ill-luck in the game."

Bygrove was so obviously chagrined that it was evident he had made out little or nothing of the significance of the broken writing set before him. He looked at me with vexation, as if he expected me also to protest. I, however, gave him a light nod of satisfaction, which he was quick enough to understand.

The fact was, that being more of a spectator than either of the others, and having my attention less fixed upon seizing all I could read, I had, I was sure, taken in far more of the letter than the detective could have taken, and I had, I believed, laid hold of its one notable point of value. So I tried with a nod to assure Bygrove that all was well.

"Very well," said he, taking up his own scrap and rising, while Townshend rose also, "you've had the best of it, Mr. Townshend. In our next game it may be different."

"It may," said Townshend, with the slightest flourish of a bow.

"Well, now, Mr. Townshend, if you're ready," said Bygrove, "we'll begin."

"Begin what? The next game?" asked Townshend, with a conscious smile.

"The tour of the house," said Bygrove, with serious face.

"Ah, now," said Townshend, looking at his watch, "if you would wait for an hour or so; I must run to the station and telegraph to a particular friend." Bygrove considered him closely. "You don't mind waiting, I hope. Mr. Halliday will entertain you, and I'll find another bottle of wine."

"Very well," said Bygrove; "be quick and send your telegram."

And with a nod to us severally, saying, "Port, I dare say," he went out by the further kitchen door toward the cellarage.

"Are you not surprised," said Bygrove, in a whisper, "that I have agreed to his going?"

"If I understand it," said I, "he has no intention of going at present."

"What! Not to telegraph?"

"No. I don't think," said I, "that he means to leave the house, if he has made the discovery that I think he has."

"And what is that?" asked the detective.

But at that moment Townshend returned with the promised bottle of port.

He drew the cork carefully, and then withdrew into the house, saying, "In an hour."

"Whether he has gone to telegraph or not," said Bygrove, "he'll come back; if he goes out by the usual entrances he'll be followed, and if he tries to get to the station by some way I don't know, he'll still be marked at the station; I've arranged all that. But he'll come back; he's not the man to leave things as they are, and forsake his pals that are somewhere about. But why do you think he's not going? What discovery do you mean?"

"First of all," said I, "that wine-cellar he took us to is not *the* wine-cellar."

"I thought as much," said Bygrove, with emphasis.

"And," said I, "you almost said as much. But his not showing you the cellar made me think more about the wine than ever, and I fixed my eye on that when he showed his part of the letter. Did you make out anything of it?" I asked.

"No," said he, "I did not."

"Well, let me tell you what I made of it." The letter began, as I suppose you saw, '*My Dear Boy.*' What came after that I did not stop to make out; I went on to the broken part which joins on to your scrap, and there I think I made a discovery, and so, I believe, did Townshend. You remember that on the third line we doubted whether it read '*ink*' or '*inth*?' "

Bygrove again produced the scrap and laid it on the table. I pointed to the line.

"I saw," said I, "that there is only one letter wanting in that word, and the letter is 'b.'"

"B?" exclaimed Bygrove. "That would make 'bink' or 'binth,' and they're both words that don't exist!"

"Both words that are not words," said I. "I prefer the second one, because I see what it may mean. Let us fill up the lines of the scrap."

There was no paper at hand, so I left the kitchen to seek some in the study. As I crossed the hall I had a disturbing suspicion that I saw a leg disappear round the turning of the great staircase. It gave me a shock to remember that we might be surrounded and spied upon by I knew not what or how many desperate and unscrupulous enemies. I entered the study, but could find no writing-paper save the half sheet on which Townshend had written the luncheon *menu* the day before; and so with that I returned to the kitchen. I told the detective of my suspicion that someone was lurking on the stairs.

"Let us be quick," said he, "and get through this, and then we'll look round."

So on the back of the *menu* I wrote out

the completion of the lines of the scrap as follows :

"I shall put th-ings all in order in case of trouble. I have fully to-ld you to take care of the wine, and especially of the b-inth bottles. Be very careful of my directions.

"All has been done for you, and after all I have on-ly been a freebooter, as our ancestors were. Forgive me, my son. I have a presentiment I shall not last much longer. I leave you to restore our name."

"Take care of the wine and especially of the binth bottles," read Bygrove. "Well, now, will you tell me what on earth a 'binth bottle' is?"

"I'll tell you what I think it is. You know the cellar—like all big cellars—is divided into bins, each bin being numbered and perhaps labelled with the name of the wine that it holds. Now, don't you guess what the 'binth bottle' may mean? All the wine is to be taken care of, but especially the binth bottle of every bin; in bin 5, that is to say, the fifth bottle; in bin 10 the tenth bottle, and so on."

"I see!" exclaimed Bygrove. "But how the deuce did you think of that?"

"Oh," said I, "it's like something we learn in algebra."

"Algebra!" exclaimed he. "There! That's

what it is to have a college education! I suppose it really might be some good in our line. I suppose that devil Townshend has had a college education too?"

"Very likely he has," said I.

"Now," said he, rising "we must try that. Let's see what there is in particular about a *binth* bottle."

He was folding the piece of paper on which I had written, when he noticed that it was written upon also on the other side.

"Halloa!" said he. "Whose hand is this?"

"Townshend's," said I. "It's a *menu* he made out yesterday for the joke of the thing."

"Then, by Jingo!" he exclaimed, "I have him!"

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"I'll tell you presently. Meantime we must get on with this."

I led the way out of the kitchen, Bygrove jealously carrying his bag with him, and on down, down to the great wine-cellar. When we reached it, however, we found that it was locked.

"Are you sure," asked Bygrove, "that this is it?"

"Quite sure," I answered.

"Well," said he, "we must wait. Let us see if we can get out as you went last night."

I led on, and presently we came to the ten steps

and the small door. The door was bolted within. We undid the bolts and walked into the open air, which was exceedingly close and heavy, so that odors of all kinds hung low.

"It seems to me," said Bygrove, standing in the midst of the paved yard and sniffing, "that I smell a particularly strong cigar. There's a little open window; there must be somebody in there."

At once he marched, and I followed, into an open stable, swept and garnished, and made for a steep ladder whose head was fixed in a wide trap-door in the ceiling. He essayed to ascend, but after a step or two he stopped and drew back.

"What a brute!" he exclaimed.

I pressed behind him and saw Cloots crouching at the top. I explained in a few words who Cloots was, and the detective took another step up; but Cloots *wawled* and spat, and warned him to desist.

"Let me go first," I said.

So I passed Bygrove, with word and hand soothed Cloots, and mounted to the top. Bygrove followed, and pushed past me on to an inner door, which was ajar. The odor of rank tobacco, and the sight of blue smoke wreathing itself in the draught of the doorway drew us both on.

Cloots withdrew a little and sat up and watched us.

CHAPTER XVII.

WILLIAM HINE.

The detective marched with his bag, and I followed, across the bare floor.

"Who the h—ll's that?" growled a voice within.

Bygrove pushed wide the door, and we saw a "fair, farmer-looking" man, none other, indeed, than Hine, lying on a pile of straw smoking a cigar.

"What the bloomin' blazes!" he roared, "d'ye want in here? Can't a cove——"

"You're William Hine," said Bygrove, interrupting him with a raised forefinger.

"Eh? No, I ain't—party o' the name o' Chigwell—Chigwell: that's my name."

"I have a warrant," said Bygrove, displaying a paper, "for the arrest of William Hine, *alias* Chigwell, a 'fair, ruddy, farmer-looking man,' said to be a betting man, and believed to be a burglar, and all the rest of it, on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of John Ord—you know •

where in Camberwell—and, William Hine, I arrest you," saying which he touched him with his fingers on the shoulder.

Under the touch Hine collapsed at once.

"Sold again!" he growled, turning his face to the wall. "And collared, by Jingo! It's swell Townshend, ain't it, that's puttin' me away, blarst 'im?"

"It's William Hine that's given himself away," said Bygrove, "by being such a common fool as to come to hide here."

"I didn't come to 'ide 'ere," said Hine, sulkily.

"I know you didn't—not altogether; you came also to look after the plunder."

"Eh?" he exclaimed, turning. "Wot plunder? Wot d'ye mean? I don't know of no plunder!"

"I don't suppose you do, not much," said Bygrove. "Townshend takes care you don't."

"Yes; blarst 'im! Have ye collared 'im?"

"No," said Bygrove, with a wink aside to me; "he's not in this Camberwell affair."

"Oh, ain't he? P'raps he ain't!"

"Now, come," said Bygrove, "you must get up and go with me," and he tapped him on the arm.

"Oh, crimes!" he roared. "Mind my arm!"

• "What's the matter with it?" asked Bygrove,

turning down the covering to look at his left arm. It was a painful sight. The shirt was discolored and hard with blood, and the arm was stiff, and appeared enormously swollen. "Ah," said Bygrove, "that comes of trying to murder this gentleman in the dark last night."

"Murder? S'welp me! I never tried to murder nobody. I only tried to dot 'im. What does he want comin' about 'ere, spoilin' sport?"

"This arm must be seen to, Hine; if it isn't seen to, it will swell up, and mortify, and you'll need to have it cut off, if it doesn't kill you by then."

"'Oly Moses! You don't say so? Swell Townshend said he was comin' back, when he brought me some breakfast, but he ain't been yet."

"Look here," said Bygrove; "if you give me your word you'll go quietly and try no tricks, I'll take you into the house, and the young lady'll dress it for you. If not, I must put on the bracelets."

"Give ye my word!" said he, sulkily. "But look at that blarsted cat. 'Ow am I to get past 'im? Yer wouldn't never 'ave found me yere, if it 'adn't been for 'im! He drew me in yere, and he's kep' me yere! 'Ow am I to get past 'im?"

We led him past Cloots—who appeared to under-

stand he was now in secure custody—into the house by the way we had come, and, after I had found her and given her warning, into the presence of Cicely in the drawing-room, Cloots following close at our heels like a dog. Cicely was very pale but resolute over her task; she frequently regarded the man's face curiously, but she said no word, neither of pity nor of interest, till it was done. Then, while Bygrove led him away for temporary security to the kitchen—that, with Cloots' constant guardianship, appearing sufficient—she turned eagerly to me.

“Who is that man?” she asked.

“He has been caught in hiding,” said I, “and the detective has arrested him on suspicion.” I was reluctant to tell her all the truth.

“On suspicion of what?” she asked. “I see you are keeping something back.”

“On suspicion,” I answered, “of having to do with that murder in Camberwell.”

“Oh,” she cried, “how horrible! And is that how he came by that dreadful arm?”

“No,” said I, with reluctance. “That was done last night. Cloots did it. The man tried to knock me down and Cloots flew at him.”

“And that,” said she, with a generous flush, which immediately assumed a touch of embarrass-

ment—"that is another danger you ran because I sent you away."

I could say nothing ; I could but look at her, and blush myself. She at once changed the subject.

"But why," she asked—"why did the man come to hide here? Had he anything to do with this place? or with my father? Oh, Mr. Halliday, what does it all mean? Is my father concerned in all this? Oh, surely, surely, *he* is not dead, too, by this man? What do you think?—or know?"

"I think," said I, "your father has gone away in secret to remain where he can't very well be found for awhile." After my own and Bygrove's suspicions and discoveries I was really inclined to think that might be the explanation of his absence.

"But why should he run away to hide?" she asked ; "for that's what you mean."

"I don't think I can tell you quite," I said ; "but I'm sure Mr. Bygrove will tell you soon."

She sat down, looking very white and scared, but very composed. I hurried away, for I feared that if I stayed I might be tempted to betray my feeling toward her. I found Bygrove waiting for me in the hall. He was standing in contemplation of the fine, proud bronze head of Sir Ralph.

"And to think," said he, with a turn toward me,

"that that splendid gentleman—the possessor of an old name and an old estate—who might have been a great soldier, a great politician, or a great counsellor, a great man of any sort—that's a head fit for anything—should have lowered himself to be in with a gang of burglars and to be a common fence!"

"A fence?" said a voice behind us—it was Cicely's. "What is a fence?"

"A fence, Miss Grimston?" said the detective, obviously put out. He looked at her, and then down at his boots, and then sideways at me. "I should have thought a young lady brought up in the country hardly needed to be told what a fence is."

"Oh, don't trifle with me!" cried Cicely; "tell me the truth. I can bear it—believe me—however mean and bitter it may be! I guess it is mean and bitter, but if I don't know it I may think it is meaner and bitterer than it really is! Please tell me!"

He glanced at me, but I gave no sign.

"Well, Miss Grimston," said he, "I suppose it is best to tell you. A fence is a receiver of stolen goods," he declared, with brutal frankness.

"And is my father that?" she asked, looking pale and ashamed.

"Sir Ralph," answered the detective, "is that and more, in a very superior kind of way." Glancing out by the open hall-door something caught his eye. "Do you see that big spider's web, Miss Grimston, on that bush of evergreen?" he asked, pointing to an ample and perfect net of gossamer shining in the sun. We all three moved to the door-step. "You see," continued Bygrove, "the big spider right in the centre of the web : that's just like Sir Ralph living here all alone. He had spun a wonderful web reaching out, the Lord knows where all—to Spain and Holland and everywhere pretty well—and everything that got caught in his web he collared—for a consideration. Everything he could not use at once he wrapped carefully away; this house, Miss Grimston, is full of valuable things wrapped up and put carefully away."

When he mentioned "valuable things wrapped up" she glanced sharply at me, as if suspecting I must have told him of my discovery of the secret room; and I felt, somehow, mean and ashamed.

"You mean *stolen* things?" she said.

"Well, yes," he assented, "I mean that."

She looked at him a moment or two with steady eyes, and then she flushed.

"I don't believe it!" she exclaimed. "You don't

know my father! Why don't you find him and charge him with these things to his face? He will answer you!"

"Why don't I find him, Miss Grimston?" he asked, with an irritating smile of indulgence. "Let me show you why."

He stepped out to the spider's web, and we followed him. He picked up a small twig and ran it through a remote part of the web so that a filament or two was broken. The web was, of course, violently agitated, and the spider scurried away from his central seat and hid himself under a leaf at the further end of one of his main threads.

"I don't believe it!" said she, angrily. "I *won't* believe it!"

She was returning with quick step to the door, when it swung swiftly to and closed with a resounding slam. That was sufficiently surprising, since, when we stood on the step, we had perceived no draught likely to seize the door in its current; but more surprising still it was to find, upon trial, that the door would not yield: *it was securely latched or bolted within!*

Then we looked at each other, and the current of our attention was changed. We all thought of the mysterious marauders who had visited the house

in the night, but of whom we had as yet seen nothing by day, insomuch that we had almost forgotten that they were probably close at hand, if not lying hidden in the house itself; and I thought and reminded Bygrove of my suspicion of a little while before when I had gone to the study for a sheet of paper. Had these men now got possession of the house, and by an adroit and silent move excluded all those whom they had any reason to doubt or fear?

"Townshend's hour is almost up," said the detective, while Cicely glanced at him with such alarm as showed that she understood the saying in a figurative sense. "But my bag in the kitchen! I must get at it somehow and push this business through. How can we get into the house now?"

Cicely and I glanced at each other; we both thought of the tree and her bedroom window, but we held our peace.

"I think," said I, "we had better try the little door at the end of the cellar passage."

So thither we went, round by the terrace. As we passed the grated kitchen window we glanced in, and were somewhat cheered by seeing no one but Hine, who sat, with sulky fear and anger, re-

garding Cloots, ostentatiously pretending to doze on the dresser. We found, to our relief, the little door simply on the latch as we had left it. I raised the latch to lead the way down into the darkness.

"Let me take your hand," said I to Cicely; "it is so dark down here you may miss your footing."

She gave me her hand at once, and her touch thrilled through me, and thus we descended, the detective closing the door when Cicely and I had reached the bottom of the steps and following after us. So we pushed along the dark passage. As we advanced there broke out ahead of us the hideous squawl and scream of a cat. The sounds first made us halt and then drew us on at an increased pace.

"It must be Cloots!" I said.

The scream passed from its unbroken strain, and became torn and wavering, as if the creature were fighting and worrying with the utmost ferocity. Then we ran, and with our speed we burst, almost before we were aware, into the kitchen, and found ourselves in the presence of half a dozen ruffians. A glance was sufficient to show the change that had been effected in the minute or two

since we had passed the kitchen window. The shutters were closed and candles were lit, while bottles and glasses stood ready on the table. I had time for no more than a glance, for my attention was seized by a burly brute, the lame man I had seen the evening before, I believed, who was trying to strangle the faithful Cloots. Quick as my eye took in the presence of the bottles I had seized one, and brought it down—whack!—upon the man's forearm. He dropped Cloots with a howl, and turned upon me with a curse. For an instant the air seemed to me full of raging faces and uplifted arms and bottles, when a clear voice sounded that allayed all the storm in a sudden and marvellous fashion.

“Steady, gentlemen, please! Hands down, and show your faces!”

It was Bygrove, who, coming along the passage more slowly than we, had just arrived on the scene.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TABLES TURNED.

"So," said Bygrove, looking round, while Cicely clung to my arm, "here you are, all on you. I have you nicely, ain't I? There ain't no use making a fuss, because I've got the place surrounded, and I've men behind me in the passage here."

"Rot!" muttered someone.

Bygrove bit the side of his forefinger and singled out with his eye a dark, lowering fellow.

"Take care, George," said the detective, shaking his forefinger at him, "we have met before, you know; you've got three convictions to your credit, so be civil. And look here, Jimmy," he continued, turning to the lame man whom I had smitten with the bottle, and who was crouching on the floor nursing his injured limb, "what is a man like you with a game leg doing in an affair of this sort? You're bound to leave tracks as plain as a poster. Just leave off groaning and hand me over that bag beside you."

"Jimmy" laid hold of the bag, got up, and limped

toward Bygrove. With an almost imperceptible motion he tested the weight of the bag, and when he was about a yard off flung the bag with all his force in the detective's face, crying, "Down with them, you fools! There ain't nobody in the passage! I've been listening, and I tell you there ain't nobody!"

Bygrove adroitly saved his face from the blow and caught the bag in his arms against his chest; but at the same instant he was caught from behind with a garroter's hug, the bag dropped from his arms, and he fell back with his assailant. I had barely time to note what was happening to him when I myself was attacked by the dark, lowering man whom the detective had called "George." He had me about the waist with my arms close pinioned to my sides, and took my revolver from my pocket before I was aware.

"Don't you be frightened, my dear," said the lame man to Miss Grimston, who stood rigid and pale, with her hands clenched. "We ain't going to do you no harm."

That he said with a hideous leer which made me shudder, the more so that another, hearing his words and remarking his look, said, with a grin, "She's a nice bit, ain't she, Jimmy?"

"Of course she is," said Jimmy. "She's as proper a girl as you'll see in a twelvemonth of Sundays."

"She's like her guv'nor, the old 'un. Blarst 'im!" exclaimed William Hine.

"Cowards! Villains! Brutes!" she exclaimed. "How dare you speak to me so! How dare you treat these friends of mine and of my father so!"

"Friends of your father be dashed, lady!" cried Hine. "They ain't no friends of nobody as has to do with this shop!"

As for Bygrove and myself we had been rendered powerless to speak or to move. With the expedition of practised hands they had bound us with scarves and gagged us with corks and handkerchiefs, and then, with roars of laughter, they had tied us back to back.

"Let them put their heads together," said the dark, lowering man, "and see if they can get out of this."

For a minute or two we thus occupied the attention of all the ribald crew, who from their first appearance of whipped and snarling curs when the detective had first faced them, had changed to drunken and riotous satyrs. They sat upon the table and potred tumblers of raw whiskey and

brandy down their throats; they taunted us with our helplessness in their hands; they broke jests upon us and laughed at us, and, in a half shame-faced way, they made improper comments upon Miss Grimston's beauty and spirit. I watched her with the intensest anxiety where she stood, pale and rigid, with her back to the wall. I gladly noted that there was no sign of failing courage about her, and I observed—what none of our captors seemed to remark—that she had slipped from a nail near her a riding-whip of hippopotamus' hide, the formidableness of which I had often considered; she hid it against her arm, and put her hands behind her. She might break down when this crisis was past, but it was plain that then her nerves and muscles were set like steel, and that she was resolute to defend herself to the utmost. Nor was she afraid to speak to the ruffians.

"Are you men at all?" she said once when they had roared with laughter at an improper allusion of one of them. "You may be sure this won't be forgotten when you come to be punished."

"We ain't bagged yet, miss," said Hine, upon which there was another roar of laughter.

But presently there broke in upon the riot and laughter one, two rusty, threatening, lugubrious

clangs of that bell whose sound had made me shiver in the dead waste of the night. Then they were all struck silent and aghast. They looked at each other in perplexity and fear, as if they dared scarcely credit the suspicion that arose in them.

"That," said Cicely, "must be my father. You had better open the door to him and go down on your knees."

"It's only Swell Townshend," said the dark, lowering man, "and he shan't come in till our job's done. Come, boys! We must get them out of this, d—n them! You stay here, missy."

They undid the bond that bound Bygrove and me together, and proceeded summarily to hurry us, neck and crop, into the passage by which we had entered the kitchen. Two strong ruffians had hold of each of us, so that what resistance we attempted was of no avail, and we were compelled to go into the narrow darkness that led to the cellarage. Bygrove was thrust along foremost, and I, as I was pushed through the doorway, contrived to turn my head and to give Cicely a beckoning look, which I meant to signify that it might be well for her if she tried to accompany us. Whether she understood my look I could not tell, for the next instant

I was plunged into the darkness and hurried, clattering, down the sloping passage.

Whither were they taking us? Down, down the passage, and down some steps, till I guessed we must be near the great wine-cellar. Presently a light came on behind us: one of the crew was bringing a candle.

"Here's a proper-looking sort of jug," said the dark, lowering man, stopping before the wine-cellar door, "to pop the beggars into."

He tried the door; it was locked. Then he threw his heavy body against it; the door was solid, and did not seem even to shake. He seemed inclined to leave it alone and to hurry us along somewhere else, when the furious, hoarse clanging of the rusty bell echoed ominously down the passage upon us. Hearing that, he swore a great oath and flung himself with such force upon the door once and again that at last it yielded with a snap; either the lock was broken or the staple was driven out. He had flung himself finally upon the door with such recklessness that when it flew open he fell sprawling within.

Now, during this delay in getting the door burst open, I had been able to glance round and to note that Cicely was hovering behind, the man bearing

the light to the rearward being too much engrossed with his comrade's efforts (and, I think, too drunk) to observe her presence. The dark, lowering fellow had risen, and we had been thrust in, with such joeose adieux as "Good-afternoon," "Good-night," "Hope you'll sleep well," croaked at us, when to my amazement and admiration I saw Cicely quietly take the candle from the man who bore it—before he knew what she was about—and slip through the others into the cellar.

"Come out o' that!" cried the dark ruffian.
"No, no; that isn't the place for you!"

She tried to shut the door, while I grew wild with rage that I could only help her by setting my back against it; but the great ruffian kept it open with his foot, and was steadily pushing us away and urging himself in. Then there rang down the passage a voice which we all recognized.

"God d—n the devil! What are you doing there? Come out of that!"

I thought of Townshend's fears of what we might discover in that cellar, and I roared—simply roared—in my desire and effort to speak. Cicely, seeing and hearing that, tore down a little the handkerchief that gagged me, and eased my mouth enough for me to say in thick, but

fairly intelligible, tones, "Quick! Quick! Your whip!"

Quick as thought she drew back from the door a little, as if she were yielding, so that the dark ruffian, with a laugh, edged himself further in. Then she raised her left hand and gave him a cut across the face with the terrible whip of hippopotamus' hide. With a howl of agony he fell back; we pushed to the door, and Cicely thrust home the two great bolts.

We were imprisoned, but Townshend was baffled.

I had wondered why Bygrove had made no offer of assistance in this last wild effort; but now I saw he had been thrust in with such force that he had fallen down the two or three steps just beyond the door, and that he lay insensible. In a second or two Cicely had undone my bonds, and then we both turned to revive the unfortunate detective.

"How clever you were," I could not avoid saying to her, "to get possession of the candle!"

She answered me only with a thin smile and a fluttering sob, which suggested what an effort it was for her to keep from a hysterical collapse. I thought it best to say no more to her, but to keep her occupied. I asked her to bear the candle for

me while I found a bottle of suitable liquor. I found, after a little, a small bin of cognac. I took a bottle, and with the corkscrew of my pocket-knife (I was glad in that moment that I had retained the boyish habit of carrying multifarious cutlery) I drew the cork. I poured a little directly from the bottle into Bygrove's mouth, and the effect was electrical. He had swallowed but two gulps when the effect of the lively spirit rushed through him like new life, and he sat up. He looked at me and at Cicely, and then round him slowly on the rows upon rows of bottles. Then he smiled, and said:

"The *binth* bottles!"

CHAPTER XIX.

WINE.

Cicely, naturally, thought his wits were wandering, and I had to explain the meaning of the phrase, and the interest which both the detective and Townshend took in it. She said nothing, but I understood that she was getting more and more doubtful of her father's uprightness, and sadder and sadder as she felt compelled to consider one suspicion after another.

"Let us try a *binth* bottle," said Bygrove, tottering to his feet. "We must get on with this business, and we can't get out just yet"—I had explained to him how we had bolted the door—"so we'd better make the most of our time. Let's look at a *binth* bottle."

So to the nearest bin we turned. It was numbered *thirteen*; therefore, on my theory, the valuable bottle of the bin should be the *thirteenth*. I counted and drew out the *thirteenth* bottle. It was no different from other bottles of the bin; it con-

tained wine, that is, of the same sort as they. I was disappointed and nettled, and I felt without looking that Bygrove was smiling at my miscalculating ingenuity.

"Never mind," said he, "try another."

I tried the next bin, counted up to the *fourteenth* bottle and drew it out with the same result; it was just like the other bottles. Then a new thought came to me; suppose I began counting at the other end—began reading, so to say, at the bottom of the page. In that way I tried the *thirteenth* bin, and counted up to the *thirteenth* bottle from the end. It was gone. That seemed to me and to Bygrove both significant, and I attempted the same method upon bin the *fourteenth*. I drew out the *fourteenth* bottle. It was corked and sealed, but certainly there was not wine in it. I drew the cork with my pocket corkscrew, and poured gently into the detective's hand, and then with more tilt on the bottle. When it was about level there rolled out several small diamonds. Both my calculations were proved correct.

I poured and still poured—I shook the bottle—but nothing more came and nothing rattled. Then Bygrove tried to look into the bottle while I held the light, or to see through it.

"I believe," said he, "it is stuffed with cotton wool, and in the wool, I expect, the stones are wrapped."

My corkscrew would not reach down low enough into the neck to discover what was in the bottle; but from her hair Cicely took a long silver pin, with which we soon discovered that Bygrove's guess was right. Slowly we drew forth the cotton wool, and as we drew it there fell from its folds diamonds, white and yellow, of all sizes—some were large enough to act almost as bottle-stoppers—of all sizes and of all lustres, cut and uncut.

We gazed at each other in astonishment, but we said no word. We only went eagerly to the next bin and tried its *binth* bottle in like manner. It was presumably a bin of Burgundy, and, appropriately, from its *binth* bottle there flowed rubies of the finest and deepest lustre. Was this amazing discovery to be continued throughout? It was almost incredible.

"They can't all be real stones!" I said.

"I think," said Bygrove, "you may trust him to have kept nothing that was worthless. And now I understand why that bottle was gone; it must be the one I have in my bag. Good heavens! and my bag's in the kitchen—the one Townshend had

sent off. It was a hock bottle filled with gold, beaten and twisted.

"He must have come upon it by chance," I said, "or else he'd have found these others too; he didn't understand about the binth bottle till he saw your bit of the letter."

"Confound him!" exclaimed the detective. "But he's out of it now."

"The candle will soon be out," said Cicely. "Hadn't we better think of getting out of prison before you trouble about all these treasures, that can't belong to you or to me or to anyone around?"

"Remember, Miss Grimston," said I, "we are, in a certain sense, our own prisoners. The only fastenings of the door that I can think of are the bolts we pushed ourselves. We might walk out this minute, if it were not for falling again into the hands of those ruffians."

"We can't use the door," said Bygrove, resolutely; "at least, not till we have found there is no other way. There must surely be a grating or something of the kind against the outside wall."

At that moment we heard from the other end of the cellar a confused hum and roar of voices, like the sound of distant applause; and at about the same

instant the biting noise of a rat or of a boring instrument upon the door. Between the two we were held perplexed for a little. We went and examined the door. It was of stout old oak, almost as solid as a wall apparently. Yet upon laying my ear to it, I could distinctly hear the biting, grinding sound of an instrument. I ventured a guess.

"Someone," I said, "is trying to bore a hole with a gimlet or an auger."

"If it's anyone," said Bygrove, "it's Townshend. He wants to bargain with us."

"Then why not let him?" asked Cicely.

"My dear young lady," said the detective, "I never bargain with a criminal."

"What," she asked, "is Mr. Townshend a criminal too? Oh, dear me! How dreadful it all is! I can endure it no more! I wish I had never been born!"

Upon that she sat down on the ground and burst into a hysterical fit of sobbing. I tried to soothe and compose her, but with little avail, while Bygrove tried to enter into parley with the person on the other side of the door.

"Are you Mr. Townshend?" he cried through the key-hole, and then applied his ear to receive a reply.

"Wait a moment," came the answer.

In a few seconds more the auger-hole was driven through a circle about an inch and a half in diameter.

"Now," continued the answering voice easily and clearly through the hole, "what do you want of me? I'm Mr. Townshend."

"Nothing," answered Bygrove. "But there's a lady here. Where are your pals?"

"I know nothing of pals," answered Townshend. "But the ruffians I found here are upstairs drinking and overhauling the plunder they've found in a secret room. The lady and the rest of you had better unbolt the door and come out."

"And let you in?" queried Bygrove. "Not just yet, thank you."

"These ruffians may be down at any moment. You'd better get out and away at once."

"We can't come out," answered Bygrove, "till you give me your word of honor that your ruffians are all locked into separate rooms."

"Your proposal is utterly absurd, Mr. Detective," said Townshend, "and if you don't come out at once I'll burn you out."

Burn us out? What did he mean? Was the man become desperate, and rather than think that

the treasure (which, no doubt, he believed we were collecting) should be carried off, did he propose to set fire to the house?

"We can't come out," repeated Bygrove, "till you give me your word, as I said."

No more passed on either side.

"He'll try to do as he says," observed Bygrove under his breath to me.

"Why, then, can't we make terms with him?" I asked, "and get out of this?"

"And leave him, as soon as we are secured again by his pals—leave him to secure all this plunder? Not me!"

"But think of Miss Grimston."

"I beg your pardon, and Miss Grimston's pardon, but I can't think of Miss Grimston to the extent of losing my reputation and my place. We must find another way out. Let us look for a grating or something at the other end."

Miss Grimston insisted upon rousing herself to accompany us on our quest; she could not bear, she said, to be parted from the candle, which was now burned almost down into the socket. We found a grating, as we had hoped. It was, however, as little promising as could be. It was in the roof or pavement over our heads, and, from the dim

light which showed through it, it clearly was not in the open. It consisted of ten stout bars—I well remember the number—each about three inches apart, and each embedded in the stones.

“Now while the candle lasts, and while you are trying this, I’ll move all the *binth* bottles to an empty bin, so that if Townshend or any of them *should* get in they’ll make nothing of it.” So said Bygrove, and he added, “Miss Grimston, would you prefer to help me or Mr. Halliday?”

“I’ll stay here,” said she. So we considered whether it would be easier to pick the mortar from between the stones or the lead from the ends of the bars. We tried with our knives—Cicely borrowed Bygrove’s—and with the glass of broken bottles, and found that the lead was softer than the cement. We had not worked long at that when we found that the necessity of having our hands higher than our heads so wearied us and then became so painful that we had to let them drop limp by our sides. As we went on, these pauses had to be more and more frequent, and when our hands dropped the rush of blood to them became more and more painful, till at length we sat down together on the cellar-floor in something like despair.

“This seems hopeless,” said I.

"What is there else for us to do?" asked she.

"Nothing," I admitted, "but undo the bolts and walk out."

"There's half an inch of candle yet in the socket," Bygrove said; "let us have another look round."

We hastily but attentively conducted that look round, but it showed us nothing; there were but two modes of egress—the door and the grating—and to the grating we had to return, and to our scratching and scraping of the lead.

Presently our candle was burned out, but the dim light from above was sufficient to show us the bars that kept us down. We reckoned that if we got two removed we might escape; but the removal of two bars meant the scraping away of four lead settings, and that at our rate of progress seemed as if it would be an eternal task. To make our situation more terrible and tragic, we presently began to see red flames, at the inner end of the cellar, about the door. First we noted no more than a broad red pencilling at the bottom, then we saw two glaring, but unequal eyes—the key-hole, doubtless, and the auger-hole—through which anon leaped tongues of flame. There could be no doubt that Townshend was carrying out his threat.

"You see!" said I to Bygrove. "Let us risk it, and go out by the door."

"I refuse to risk going out by the door," said Cicely.

We continued our task. We felt as if we scraped at the lead by the hour, though we knew there could not be more than a few minutes between our pauses. Cicely sat down against the end of a bin and went to sleep, and I put my coat round her. Then Bygrove, having accomplished his affairs of the bottles, took her place with me. Our hands became terribly sore and swelled. When we paused we sat down and rested them in our lap to ease the pain which the returning blood drove into them. But we worked on without a word till the blood began to ooze from under our nails.

"I must rest awhile," I said, and sat down with my back against the wall, and dropped off into a troubled sleep. How long I slept I cannot tell, but I was waked by the sound of singing and laughter echoing through the cellar, not rampantly loud, but engrossedly self-complacent. It was Bygrove; and I apprehended at once how, instead of resting (or sleeping) he had sought to stimulate his failing energy from a wine-bin, with the result that his nature had broken through its

overlaid discipline, and the detective was become merely a human being. The glare at the door, and the smell of smoke and burning in my nostrils, were too great to permit me to let him be. I went to him, and shook him, and led him back to the grating. But he was of no use then, and I rose and resumed our task alone, which the longer I worked at it seemed the more hopeless. I scraped toilsomely at the lead, till it was impossible for me to tell by the touch of my fingers—and I could not see—what progress I had made, till my hands again dropped from numbness, my finger-tips bled, and I could have cried from mere pain.

“What is the use,” I said to myself, as I sank again to rest on the floor—“what *is* the use of this brute attempt for freedom! He,” I thought, considering Bygrove, “has had, of course, his reputation on his mind, as well as the necessity of getting out of this. I have nothing but the purpose of deliverance to bend my faculties to, faculties which have, I hope, been freely educated, while Bygrove’s have only been narrowly trained. Can I, who ought to be cleverer than he, not find a better way than this brutal and painful one?”

I was thus considering and examining, when I was shaken with fear to see the creature Cloots

appear at my feet. Whence had he come? I examined the wall and the ground about my feet, and I saw a hole, between which and me Cloots kept squirming and wriggling. I knelt and looked close at the hole, and felt it, and as I felt it I found I was touching a lid or shutter that ran easily in a groove. I pushed and it yielded. It was wide enough now to admit me with a squeeze. I put my head in, and was surprised to hear the distant sound of voices. It suddenly occurred to me, what if this were a secret communication with the treasure-room in which, it had been said, the gang was carousing? If it were it would account for Cloots's presence in that room the evening before.

If I could scare them out of that room I and my companions might escape that way. I could shout and howl, and I could throw bottles; if that would suffice to scare them they would be scared. I collected some dozen empty bottles, selecting them blindly from the bins and weighing them carefully (I was of too frugal a mind, and had too tender a heart for wine, to waste full ones), and I practised throwing them up the conduit, which, so far as I could judge, was constructed like what is vulgarly known as "the spout" of a pawnbroker. Then I shouted and hallooed. The bottles which

I threw, of course, fell crashing back, so that, what with one thing and another, I was making a terrible to-do. That had one good result; it effectually roused Bygrove, who, being given to understand my discovery, my suspicion, and my purpose, advised me, if I could get out that way, to make for the nearest entrance and give the alarm to the constable I would find there. He not only advised but begged me to do so.

I listened with my head well in the opening, and hearing now no sound, I crept in. Once within I was surprised to find that progress upward was amazingly easy: the narrow walls were furnished at intervals with little blocks of wood that served as steps. I turned back an instant to advise Bygrove of the accessibility of that way of escape while I ran with all speed to the nearest gate.

"And, for God's sake," said he, "make haste! We've lost time; I've been asleep!" (As if I didn't know it!) "And the fire that devil Townshend has lighted is gaining on the door. But it will take a good while to burn it through, and then I can scatter and keep it down by throwing bottles of wine at it. If you're quick, the constabulary will be here in half an hour. Now go, and bless you!"

So I re-entered "the spout," and climbed up I know not whither. I had climbed, it seemed to me, the whole height of the house, when I struck my head a violent blow on the crown.

"It must be the roof," I thought.

I had presence of mind enough to jam my legs against the walls of "the spout" to keep myself from falling. My knee thus pressed open a flap, and I had just time to draw myself through the opening thus made into the daylight of a room when I collapsed in something of a faint.

In a condition between consciousness and dreaming I surveyed all the strangeness and desolation of the crisis in which I was caught. It seemed ages since I had been a careless undergraduate at Cambridge, and years since I had left my family in Spain. I had known only anxiety, suspicion, and pain since I had set out to find Sir Ralph Grimston; I had neither money nor prospects; I was there, in that mansion (in whatever part of it I was), as in an *oubliette*, and yet I was neither desperate nor dismayed. I was young and strong, and there was one living, burning fact shining through all the danger and darkness of my situation—Love. All my faculties were caught in a romantic passion, and my isolation and darkness only drew and con-

densed it more to an ecstasy. What mattered it that I had known the girl I loved only a day or two? When your fate has looked you in the eyes, and seized your heart and soul, time is of no account. I knew I was not the kind of eligible person she would be expected to marry; but that only drew me more resolutely on to win her; and I am free to confess that the disgrace which enveloped her father's name rather pleased than distressed me, because I felt it would bring her nearer my level, and would give me a better chance of being all in all to her. At the same time I was ready to serve her with toil of heart and head and hands.

Now, throughout this trance-like musing the diabolical head of Cloots kept hovering over me, as I had seen it—or fancied I had seen it—when I was at the bottom of that well, and at length it fixed my attention. How it came to me who can tell? Perhaps my head had been cleared or stimulated by the blow it had received. But in a moment, when I had considered how he was said to be so much attached to Sir Ralph, and how he persistently went with me in a certain direction through the park, but would not return, I saw as convincingly as if I had reasoned it out from a great

array of evidence that the cat wished to lead me to his master. I turned this conclusion over and over, and the more I revolved it the more I was satisfied. Then I began to afflict myself that I could not arise at once and go out on my quest. I labored to wake, I struggled to rise, but the only result was pain, pain in my head. At last I came to, or woke up, and looked around me.

Near me sat Cloots purring, and all around, in tumbled disorder, was the strangest array of plunder. It was as if the palaces and churches of Europe had been looted of their most cherished specimens of art in metals, textiles, and paint, and as if the reckless looter had wearied of his loot and flung it all together. Here was an altar-piece, by Murillo, from a Spanish cathedral; there a silver-gilt shield with *repoussé* figures, by Benvenuto Cellini or one of his pupils—a theft, probably, from a Florentine palazzo, and in another place an ancient jewelled casket, perhaps from some royal museum. Besides these there were jumbled together a plethora of priceless things—gold and silver, ebony and ivory, gorgeous silks and figure-wrought tapestries—enough to make any palace that was decked with them the talk of a country.

All that I saw half-absently. A moment's re-

flection showed me that I must be in that secret treasure-room into which I had stumbled the evening before, and in which, if Townshend was to be believed, the "cracksman" crew had, within the half-hour, been "spreading" themselves. I recalled my errand; I bethought that I must have lost some considerable time, and I roused myself to go on my way.

I saw before me an open door (it was clear the secrets of the house were being exposed one by one), and I went to it. It was the door which gave upon the turret. In a second or two I was out, through the turret-room, down the corkscrew stairs, and away into the park among the trees, flying bare-headed toward the churchyard gate to find the constable whom I knew should be stationed there.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GREEN FLY.

The sun was sinking, glorious and golden, in the west as I burst away under the trees, without hat or coat, through the rank grass and the changing bracken. The soft September haze was already beginning to rise from the ground, but not enough to obscure anything.

'A ten minutes' race brought me panting to the churchyard gate, where I was promptly encountered by the constable lying in wait.

"A message," I said, breathlessly, "from Mr. Bygrove: '*Pass the word at once and make straight for the house.*'"

The constable looked at me and blew his whistle. On the instant there came a shrill reply, and in a second or two there appeared running a leggy young man, whom I readily recognized as the "Joe" who had carried my luggage from the station. He stared and considered my disreputable condition with open mouth. I saw recognition in his eye.

"Eh!" he said, "doan't you look bad! Be it Sir Rafe, or ghosts, or what?"

"Scurry along, Joe," said the constable, cutting short his inquiries. "You know what to do."

And Joe scurried along with a fleetness I should not have thought his loose legs capable of—out of the churchyard and away into the high-road.

"You're sending the word round, I suppose," I said to the constable.

"Yes, sir," said he. "Joe'll get to the next man in five minutes, and then after that we're close enough to hear a whistle passed round. In fifteen or twenty minutes we'll all be up at th' house. Are you going on, sir?" he asked, tightening his belt preparatory to starting off at a run.

"Presently, constable," I said. "I've had a knock, and I find I must rest a little first."

"Well, you must mind the damps, sir, that do rise about now."

With that advice he went off, and I sank down to rest where I stood in a well-shaded nook. My nerves and muscles, young and strong though I was, were overwrought to utter weariness, and I could with the extremest content have gone to sleep. But my brain was acutely awake. Casually, as between sleep and wake, I saw a couple of

workmen come forth from the church, crow-bar and pick-axe in hand. They threw their tools into a little pent-house against the tower, pulled on their coats, and took their way home by the farther end of the churchyard. As they approached the yew-tree I saw them stop and burst into yells of stiff laughter. Then they made a flout with their hands at something, and drew back with fresh shouts.

"Surely, it must be Cloots!" I thought, and rose and ran along.

Sure enough it was Cloots, crouched on the top of that tomb I have spoken of, and with his ears flattened, his horns of hair stiff, and his teeth and fangs displayed, looking the most terrible picture of fiendish and wild-cat ferocity that can be conceived. He growled and spat at the men, and had one strong forearm outstretched, with claws ready to strike and tear if he were touched.

"You'd better let him alone," I said. "He's a terrible beast."

"We know 'ur, maister," said they; "he be one o' Sir Rafe's fancies, and pretty hugly at that." And they went away.

Then I approached and talked soothingly to him, but at first he resented my overtures and made as

if he would strike when I put out my hand toward him. At length, however, he let me sit down by him and stroke his head. And as I sat and caressed him, myself somewhat soothed by contact with the grateful, familiar creature, I looked around at the shadows and mists beginning to creep over field and woodland. It had been again a hazy, sultry day, and the quiet and coolness were pleasant. I had rested thus for some seconds when I observed Cloots sniffing delicately, as a cat does, at the edge of the tomb-lid on which I sat. I wondered why he should continue sniffing at that particular spot, when I had my attention keenly aroused by seeing a green fly creep into sight there and take wing, while Cloots vainly struck at it with his paw. Even with my scanty knowledge of ethnology, I identified the insect at once as a *car-rion fly*! What was the meaning of its appearance there? Had it only been making a casual excursion along the edge? or had it come out of the tomb? Still Cloots sniffed, and still I watched and wondered, till another green fly appeared in similar fashion. Then I stooped to the ground and examined the edges, which, I should say, stood out an inch or two from the wall of the tomb. The mortar, which should have sealed it up all

round, was either broken or detached from the top slab, and at the point where Cloots sniffed and the flies appeared the mortar was crushed and the stone chipped, as by the insertion of a crow-bar, so that there was a small hole. I applied my nose, but the stench at once made me recoil. It was strange. A properly confined body should not smell like that, nor should a properly entombed coffin be merely covered over with an uncemented slab!

A dreadful suspicion invaded my head with a rush, so that the blood sang in my ears. Suppose the last body put in there was uncoffined? To suspect was to be resolved. I ran to the foot of the tower where I had seen the workmen cast their tools, and seizing a crow-bar ran back to the tomb. I pried its point in at the spot where Cloots had sniffed and the flies had emerged. The slab moved at once. I found a stone, with which I propped the slab open. Then I returned to the workmen's tool-place and found a block of wood. With my hands I had raised the slab about a foot, when it slipped from my grasp and slid over on the other side, leaving the interior of the tomb exposed. One glance was enough. I saw disordered clothes, an awful face, and a white beard, and I fled! I

knew who it must be. Cloots had jumped up, and as I turned to flee he sat down at the head, and uttered such a wild "*wawl!*" as almost froze my blood. I ran straight for the house as for life, and the shadows and the mists gathered fast behind me, making me shudder and fear I knew not what. On and on I flew, scarce knowing my way in the gathering dusk, stumbling and recovering, falling and getting on my feet again, rustling through grass and tearing through bracken, till the Grimston mansion rose before me. When it did I paused in horror: I saw a ruddy flare glow in more than one window, which I took for the reflection of sunset, till a great tongue of flame shot forth.

CHAPTER XXI.

TOWNSHEND AGAIN.

I found the great hall door closed and a policeman on guard.

"Do you know," I asked, "that the house is on fire?"

"I dare say they know inside," he answered. "Let's see. Your name is Halliday? You're to go in if you like."

He knocked at the door and it was opened by another constable, who scrutinized me closely, and then permitted me to enter. I was just in time to see appear down the great staircase a procession, three abreast, of constables and prisoners, each pair of constables having charge of a handcuffed man. The gang was all there, so far as I could see, all except Townshend. Bygrove and the inspector of constabulary brought up the rear of the procession. When the detective reached the hall he greeted me with a smile.

"Well," said he, with elation, "we've done it."

"And I've found Sir Ralph!" I said, loud enough for all to hear.

"Good Lord!" groaned a rough voice, and all eyes were turned upon Hine.

"We must look after that man," said the detective aside to the inspector.

"Found Sir Ralph?" said Bygrove, keeping his eye on Hine. "Where?"

"In a tomb," I answered.

"Oh, yass," said Hine, as if to himself, "of course. Werry good."

"Dead," said Bygrove — "murdered, I suppose?"

"It seems like it," said I.

"Dotted," murmured Hine; "that's wot 'e is."

"Can you send some of your men to see to that, Mr. Inspector?" said Bygrove, aside. "Now, William Hine, where's Mr. Townshend?"

"He's gorn," answered Hine, sulkily.

"He's not gone so far," said Bygrove, "but I'll catch him."

"Don't be too sure, mister," said Hine. "It'd take a werry smart cove to nail Swell Townshend. 'E's a fly bird, 'e is, and you don't put salt on 'is tail in a 'urry."

"Swell Townshend's gone down by the cellars

somewhere," said the dark, lowering fellow. "I've said it, and I don't care."

"You ought to be blessed well scragged, you ought!" said Hine. "I'd dot you myself if I could!"

"You've been dotting too many lately, William," said Bygrove, and so saying he walked toward the kitchen, to see Townshend, I suppose.

As soon as he opened the kitchen door a volume of dense choking smoke rolled out.

"Why," he exclaimed, "the house is on fire!"

"Didn't you know?" said I.

He stood an instant aghast, and then reeled against the door.

"And Miss Grimston," he said, "is still in the cellar! I followed you out!"

I waited to hear no more, but dashed through the kitchen and onward down the passage to the cellars. I was blinded and choked with smoke, and as I went on I saw a lurid glare which grew as I stumbled forward. Suddenly I saw before me against this background of mingled smoke and flame a tall figure bearing a burden and looking in his setting like a demon of the pit. I guessed at once it must be Townshend, and that the burden he bore was the insensible form of Cicely. For an in-

stant acute jealousy seized me, and then, with quick revulsion of feeling, I bethought me that he had as good a right to save her as I, having known her for years, and, if Betsy's story was true, having hoped to win her.

He came on and was about to pass me. He seemed unconscious of my presence, and he appeared to me to be reeling from exhaustion or suffocation. He carried Cicely in his arms, and seemed engrossed with her.

"Let me take her now," I said, "and make your escape while you can. The police are waiting in the hall, and some are pushing on after me."

"No," said he, after considering me an instant, "I'll carry her right out myself, and then she may remember I was good to her." Then, evidently taking into account my presence, he exclaimed: "God damn the devil, sir! D'you think I'm afraid of the rural constabulary? They know me and I know them; we've known each other for years, and they'll be afraid to lay a finger on me. No, no, I'll see this out. I'm not in the habit of breaking down in my parts."

I had from the beginning admired the notable self-possession and courage of the man, and I admired them more than ever now; for, think as we

will of the heinousness of crime, the heroic quality even of a criminal must command our homage—and then I was by no means sure that Townshend was so much of a criminal.

“Be advised, Mr. Townshend,” said I. “In a few seconds it will be too late. Rush back down this passage and out by the back; the fire is not yet too great to hinder you, and there will be no one watching that little back door. There are a dozen constables waiting and an inspector; they’ll make you their prisoner at once.”

“You mean well,” said he, still advancing, “and I’m obliged to you. But you do not understand. I must go through with this.”

“And you don’t understand,” I said, “what new thing has happened to make them take special care of you. I’ve found Sir Ralph’s dead body!”

He stopped an instant and looked at me, and then went on.

“Oh, you have, have you? That’s all right.”

I said no more. It was now hopeless to think of escape for him, for we met Bygrove, and then the inspector, and anon we were in the hall in the presence of the whole company of constables and criminals; there were fewer constables than when I had first seen them, and I understood from Bygrove

that while one or two had gone to report on my discovery in the churchyard, others were scattered through the house trying to save what valuables they could find, for it was impossible then to do anything to arrest the progress of the fire. It was noteworthy that Townshend had not a glance, and did not seem to have a thought, to give to his unfortunate comrades. He looked wild and half delirious; he was grimed with smoke and his long hair was singed, and having laid down his burden, he murmured over her in an agony of grief. I should have been mad with jealousy had I not been convinced, from the alert glance and flash of his eye and other tokens, that he was consciously playing an unconscious part and carefully calculating the effect of his carelessness and preoccupation.

Bygrove let him be a little, out of respect probably for his apparent grief; but soon he urged the inspector, in a low voice, to "secure his man." But the inspector had clearly a respect for the "quality," to which he thought Townshend belonged; perhaps also he ventured to doubt whether all the detective's suspicions were well-founded, and, moreover, he may have had a considerable liking for Townshend, as all must have had who had known him only as a sociable person.

"Presently," said the inspector. "Mr. Townshend will be all right; I know Mr. Townshend. We should see if something can't be done to save the house."

"Save the house!" exclaimed Bygrove, irritably. "Damn the house! How can you save the house without water? We must look after our prisoners."

"I've complete possession of your prisoners, Mr. Bygrove," said the inspector, curtly.

Now, though all these little things take time in the telling, they passed as quick as thought. My attention—my anxious attention, that is, for I saw and heard these details but as a half-conscious spectator—my true attention was given to the condition of Cicely, whom all the efforts and murmurs of Townshend failed to bring to.

"Can't we take the lady into the air?" I cried, at length.

"Into the air? That's the very thing!" said Townshend, raising her in his arms, and walking toward the door he gave a glance and a grim smile at the proud bronze bust of Sir Ralph, as who should say, "You denied me your daughter while you were alive, now, see, I hold her in my arms!"

The door was respectfully opened to him by the constable in charge of it, and Townshend stepped forth with his burden, followed by me with a something gnawing at my heart, and by Bygrove gnawing at his lip and clearly a good deal put out.

The inspector also ordered his men and their charges out upon the gravel, so that there were none left in the house save the two or three men who were turning what things they thought valuable out of the window.

I knelt by Cicely and helped Townshend in his efforts to restore her. And then I noted two things: first—and it gave me a peculiar pleasure—that my coat was still about her shoulders, and, secondly, that nothing was escaping Townshend's eyes and ears; every movement of the constables, every impatient twist and turn of their handcuffed prisoners, I saw he remarked and considered. For what purpose? That was soon apparent.

The cool evening air fanned Cicely's brow and cheek, and I slapped, with care and probably with insufficient force, Cicely's hands, and presently she drew a long fluttering breath, heaved a sigh, and opened her eyes. Then, I could see, he felt free to act for himself. He rose and looked com-

posedly at the house, upon which manifestly the fire was gaining. More windows upstairs were aglow, the glass was crashing in the heat, and one long threatening flame shot out of the cloud of smoke that was beginning to pour from the roof.

"Yes," said Townshend, turning to Bygrove, "damn the house, as you say, Mr. Detective! Let it burn!—burn! It has been an unlucky house for me!"

"Just so, Mr. Townshend," said the detective. "Now perhaps you'll come along; some of us must be moving."

"One moment, Mr. Detective," said he; "my hat's on the hat-stand."

With a stride or two he was away from Bygrove and standing on the door-step. No one thought of turning, for who would have thought of him voluntarily shutting himself into a burning house? At the same instant as he put his foot on the step Cloots leaped on the step also and trotted into the house.

"Gentlemen," said he from the door-step, with one of his peculiar flourishes, "I am obliged to you for your courtesy. I have the pleasure of bidding you adieu."

Saying which he bowed, turned in, and slammed the door, as if he were the master of the house saying farewell to a body of guests.

Then there was commotion, and hammering loud and long at the door, not only because a suspect had escaped, but also because some of the constables were shut up with him in the burning house.

CHAPTER XXII.


THE END.

It almost seemed—to me, at least—that, as soon as the door had closed upon Townshend and Cloots, the fire raged more fiercely, and the flames burst forth more ferociously, as if impatient at being so long imprisoned. The strong, rustic shoulders of the constables could make no impression on the great hall-door, but they soon burst in the drawing-room windows, frames and all, and by way of them and the dining-room window by which they had first entered, their broiling comrades were released.

These, surprised to be asked about Townshend, had nothing to say except that the fire seemed mainly engaged with the left wing of the mansion, and that out of the other wing they had contrived to throw all that seemed to them of value. Then Bygrove raged furiously and swore terribly. He would, he said, give every one of his prisoners for him who had escaped. It was pointed out to him

by the inspector and myself that in all likelihood Townshend had flung himself into certain death, but that did not appease him, and he walked up and down, and round and round, surveying every window of the house. As for Cicely, having recovered consciousness, she sat in a dazed and broken condition on a bench, engrossed so completely with the evident progress of the conflagration that she even forgot she had still my coat about her. But the night was mild, and so we neither felt that coat; she did not feel its advantage, and I did not its want.

And the fire grew in grandeur and in heat. All—both criminals and their guardians—were engrossed with its splendor. At one moment I thought I saw Townshend stand at a window or on a parapet, black and monumental against the flames, and at another I thought I saw Cloots. Poor Cloots! At one instant I even believed I heard a piteous and appealing *wawl*. But the merciless and all-conquering fire raged on, and there was nothing to be done. Everyone looked with shame in the face of another because the fire had had, and must continue to have, all its own way, for there was no water within a mile all round, except in a well in the courtyard,



and no more than two water-buckets were to be found.

Presently we discovered that dark shadows came murmuring up from among the trees, and it seemed to strike us strangely that there were many people in the outer world—beyond, that is, the boundaries of The Wytches—who were curious about the progress of the fire, and who even regarded it as a species of entertaining spectacle. But soon all that had to end, and we wended our way, all of us, in the strangest and dullest apathy—constables and prisoners, and those who were neither—out of that doleful and misfortune-haunted place to the nearest village.

It was full dark night when Cicely and I and Bygrove found shelter in the village inn, while “the gang” was made secure in the village lock-up, or somewhere else. I had my coat restored to me, and, after a sufficient wash, was fairly refreshed. It was food and drink to me to be near Cicely, and to have her in some sense under my care. The dear, brave girl was dazed and preoccupied. She kept repeating, “You are very good,” but she inquired concerning nothing, and I had not the heart to tell her of my horrible discovery of *her father*. I agreed with Bygrove that we should

order a meal, though it were for nothing but the good of the house.

While the meal was being prepared Bygrove related, in answer to my questions, how, after I had left the cellar, the door-post had been consumed sufficiently by the fire to let the door be driven in easily, and how Townshend had made desperate efforts to pass through into the cellar, but how he (Bygrove) had kept him out with a steady fire of bottles until he thought the fire was too fierce to permit anyone to pass through, and the cellar was filled with suffocating smoke. Then he climbed up as I had climbed, and escaped by way of the tower as I had, and encountered the constabulary just on their arrival.

"I meant," said he, "to return at once for Miss Grimston through the house, for she could not have been got up through that spout; but in the hurry of receiving the constables breaking in and overpowering the prisoners (they, fortunately, were all upstairs drunk), I forgot all about her for the time."

"If it had not been for Townshend," said I, "she might have been stifled; we have her life to thank him for."

"Poor devil!" said Bygrove. "There's an end of him now."

"I am not sure of that," said I. "He knows that house better than anyone. He is the sort of man that never gives up a single chance of life, and I am certain he had a distinct plan of escape when he shut himself into the house."

And very soon I was proved to be right.

We sat at dinner (or supper), when a letter was brought to Miss Grimston, which, after running through hurriedly, she handed to me, saying, with a wan smile, "You are the secretary, are you not, Mr. Halliday? I think I must ask you to read that—read it aloud; I can make nothing of it." It was signed Townshend (he was not, then, lost in the burning house), and it ran as follows:

"DEAR CICELY: It is all over, but it was very sweet while it lasted. For the first time I have held you in my arms, and I would go through fire—as I did then—to do it again. But I foresee that another will claim you and that you will allow another to plead the cause you would not permit me to mention. So be it. Be happy, my dear—I'm a ne'er-do-well. I but wish to clear myself of suspicions that may haunt you concerning me. The story of these last events is a tangled one, but, believe me, I had no immediate hand in the

crimes that precipitated them. You know—or, I should say, you *don't* know—that your father, I, and the rest were engaged in a very free method of robbing society, a most impersonal creature. We had been so engaged for years, when your father thought he would give up the business and stick to the proceeds. Some of us did not quite see that. There were arguments, not always conducted on the polite principles that should prevail in good society. He wrote—and I found out that he was writing—a full account of his treasures and where they were concealed, and sent it, shrewd gentleman that he was, to his banker, and also a letter to his son, your half-brother, in India, which, by a method I shall not here detail, I sent on one of our men to get possession of. That letter I got, because I believed it was a key to the whole thing. In the meantime I visited your father in the company of another—a man named Hine—and we talked very much at large. We had high words. Your father, who was of a hasty temper, struck Hine, and Hine struck back—with his usual effectiveness. Believe me, Cicely, I had no hand in the death of your father. It was an angry word, and an angry blow, and all I had to do with the matter was to suggest where the body should be

bestowed, and to lead the way thither. When I got back to town I wrote a card to the person who had got hold of the letter written by your father to young Ralph"—["I've got that card," said Bygrove; "it's a bit of evidence."]"—"asking him to meet me and Hine at the usual place in Camberwell. He came, but he did not wish to hand over the letter to me. There was another quarrel, and that hot-headed, ready-handed Hine 'dotted' him with fatal effect. As he fell I caught the letter from his hand, but not all; the remaining fragment is in the possession of the detective. That is about all.

"Once, Cicely, you said to me, 'Why don't you live in a proper, orderly way, as other gentlemen do? If you have not money to live upon and to make your dependents happy with, why don't you learn a profession, like others, or even go into business?' Why, indeed, Cicely, except that I am not that sort of person. I am a man, as I think you know, without a name. I have no more right to the name of *Townshend*—common or distinguished as it may be—than any casual dog. I am the kind of man, Cicely, that rude people call a bastard. I was brought into the world with a certain nature; I was educated to the use and satis-

faction of certain tastes and desires. But society says I have no right to have them; I must be humble; I am nobody. It's very wrong of me, perhaps, but I cannot be humble. I aspired once to love a certain lady; I was laughed at. I wanted to be a soldier; I was refused, unless I chose to serve in the ranks. In short, society has cut me off at every turn, and what is there left for me to do but defy and fight society? What are most things that are called crimes?—merely attempts to get the better of society. I once had a dream of other things, though I meant to marry the lady I loved, and do great things for mankind. It would have been better for that lady and for me if she had married me, in spite of all; we should have made a better and braver union than any she may make now. But she did not, and I have fought, and shall continue to fight, society—stupid, absurd, and selfish society—with all my wits. Good-by, Cicely!"

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Such was Townshend's letter to Cicely Grimston, and it seems to form a fitting conclusion to my story.

Yet are there one or two things to note and to satisfy the reader concerning.

Townshend (of whom, and especially of whose escape from the burning house and his subsequent attempt to recover the treasure of precious stones in the cellar, I may tell more another day) exerted himself secretly to such purpose on behalf of his rude comrade Hine, that on the two murderous charges he got off with a finding for manslaughter. He himself was a "fly bird," as Hine said of him, and never let the detectives put salt on his tail.

Further, Cicely went back to her aunt, where I have had the frequent pleasure of visiting her with the hope and even the promise that soon we shall meet, never more to be really parted in this world.

Lastly, Cloots—the wild, the grotesque, the faithful, and the grateful—was never seen after he entered the burning mansion, which still waits, charred, empty, and hollow-eyed, for the return from India of the new Sir Ralph.

THE END.

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